Inspection of The Winsford Academy

Grange Lane, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2BT

Inspection dates:	15 and 16 July 2025
The quality of education	**Inadequate**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Inadequate**
Personal development	**Requires improvement**
Leadership and management	**Requires improvement**
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The principal of this school is Emma-Jane McLaren. This school is part of the Halliard 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), Jeremy Spencer, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Michael Gorton.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has recently raised its expectations of pupils' conduct. It uses its 'STAR' behaviour routines to share guidance on what is expected of pupils. However, staff do not manage pupils' behaviour consistently well. Frequent derogatory language, and unkind behaviour towards each other, spoils some pupils' experiences of the school. Furthermore, many pupils miss school regularly, which makes it harder for them to learn and take part in school life.

The school has raised its aspirations of what pupils should know and how well they should achieve. Pupils now study a wider breadth of subjects at key stage 4. Nevertheless, the quality of curriculum delivery is weak. Consequently, most pupils underachieve considerably.

Pupils have various opportunities to expand their interests and nurture their talents. For instance, pupils enjoy participating in cheerleading club and sporting activities. Some pupils take part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The school has begun to deliver its '10 pledge,' which helps to widen pupils' knowledge of the world. However, some pupils do not learn about the world of work when they should.

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

The new interim executive board has enhanced the governance of the school. This additional expertise has improved the quality of support and challenge given to the school. The trust has provided support to stabilise staffing and strengthen leadership. The school is better placed to make the necessary improvements. It is taking the right action to tackle deep-rooted, historical weaknesses. However, this has not made enough difference to pupils' behaviour or the quality of education that they receive currently.

The school has redesigned its curriculum to ensure that subject content is ordered to build pupils' knowledge over time. Work to ensure that staff implement the curriculum effectively is at an earlier stage of development. Many staff do not expect enough from pupils, especially in terms of the quality and depth of pupils' work. This leaves pupils ill-equipped to progress through the curriculum and achieve well.

In a small number of subjects, staff explain tasks well and use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding. However, this practice is not widespread. Many staff do not have the expertise needed to design activities that help pupils to learn subject content well. This limits the depth of pupils' understanding. Too often, gaps in pupils' knowledge are not identified quickly. Misconceptions persist, which hinder pupils' learning.

The school has strengthened how it identifies any additional needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff receive detailed information on how to best meet these needs. Some staff do not use this information consistently well. This limits how well pupils with SEND access the curriculum. Consequently, they do not achieve well.

Reading remains a high priority. The school has improved how it identifies gaps in younger pupils' reading knowledge. Staff use this information to shape support for those pupils who find reading difficult. However, this approach has not reached those older pupils who struggle to read. This means many older pupils do not gain the reading knowledge they need to access the curriculum successfully.

The school has focused sharply on improving pupils' behaviour. This has begun to yield some positive changes. Classrooms are calmer and there are fewer truancy incidents. However, recent changes have not altered the entrenched, negative attitudes that many pupils hold about learning. Often, staff ignore, or do not challenge, off-task or inattentive behaviour. This compounds the weaknesses in pupils' learning. The school has begun to tackle the use of derogatory language and unkind behaviour. However, some pupils are not confident that staff address these issues effectively enough.

The school has strengthened its strategies to improve attendance. Although this is beginning to have a positive impact, the number of pupils missing school, particularly pupils with SEND, remains stubbornly high.

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is improving. Pupils learn well about themes such as relationships, mental health and safety through the personal, social, health and economic education curriculum. Careers education has been strengthened in key stage 4. Older pupils benefit from encounters with a broad range of organisations and colleges. However, these opportunities are not offered to Year 8 and 9 pupils. This limits how well they make informed choices about their next stage of education.

Most staff appreciate the support that they receive to manage their workload and well-being. Staff are increasingly committed to making the changes needed to raise standards.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The intended curriculum is not delivered well across most subjects. This means that pupils do not build their knowledge well over time. The school should ensure that staff develop the knowledge and skills to design learning activities that help pupils to progress successfully through the curriculum.
- Staff do not identify gaps in pupils' understanding and have low expectations of the quality of work that pupils produce. This means that misconceptions are not addressed well, and pupils' learning is not secure. The school should ensure that staff use effective assessment strategies to help address gaps in pupils' knowledge and raise achievement.

- The school does not provide enough well-tailored support to help pupils in key stage 4 who struggle with reading. As a result, many older pupils cannot read well enough and this limits how well they access the curriculum. The school should ensure that it provides effective support for all pupils who struggle with reading so that they can access the curriculum well.
- Staff do not apply behaviour management systems consistently well. Consequently, off-task or inattentive behaviour remains unchallenged. The school should ensure that behaviour expectations are applied fairly and consistently so that pupils learn without interruption.
- Many pupils, particularly pupils with SEND, miss school frequently. This limits their progress through the curriculum. The school should strengthen its attendance strategies so that barriers to attendance are removed and absence levels reduce.
- Some pupils are not confident that staff address derogatory language and unkind behaviour effectively. This impacts negatively on their views of the school. The school should ensure that it strengthens how it tackles unkind behaviour and derogatory language so that pupils' experiences across the school are more positive.
- The school does not ensure that Year 8 and 9 pupils receive sufficient encounters with organisations and employers. As a result, these pupils are not informed about possible career choices as well as they should be. The school should ensure that suitable careers guidance and learning opportunities are designed for younger pupils so that they are better informed about their next stage in education and future employment.

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	136184
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10377996
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	1023
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Gorton
CEO of the trust	Jeremy Spencer
Principal	Emma-Jane McLaren
Website	http://winsford.academy
Date of previous inspection	11 July 2024, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Halliard Multi-Academy Trust.
- The current principal was appointed in September 2024.
- There have been substantial changes to the staffing and governance of the school since it was last inspected. This includes the appointment of the principal, vice principal, various subject leaders, a secondary director of education and an interim executive governing board.
- The school uses three registered alternative provisions and one unregistered alternative provision for a small number of pupils.
- The school does not meet 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.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- The inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, senior leaders and subject leaders. Inspectors met with a range of other staff and leaders during the inspection.
- Inspectors spoke with representatives of the interim executive board and the board of trustees. Inspectors also spoke with the CEO of the trust, a representative of the local authority and the providers of the alternative provision.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour across the school, including at social times.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, science, mathematics, physical education, geography and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, they held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with subject leaders and looked at pupils' work in some other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with the leaders responsible for pupils' personal development, behaviour and attendance, alternative provision, careers, the provision for pupils with SEND and reading.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and records relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour.
- 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.
- The inspectors considered the responses of parents and carers to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

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