

# Inspection of an outstanding school: West Lakes Academy

Main Street, Egremont, Cumbria CA22 2DQ

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Inspection dates:

25 and 26 April 2023

## Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, including students in the sixth form, access a high-quality education at West Lakes Academy. Leaders have the highest expectations that pupils will behave well and succeed academically. They want the best for every pupil.

For a time, leaders did not do enough to address the decline in standards of pupils' learning and behaviour. As a result, during this inspection, some pupils, parents and carers shared concerns about how well leaders have managed the school. More recently, leaders have taken appropriate and effective action to raise standards. Pupils typically achieve well, and most conduct themselves responsibly. They act respectfully towards each other. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) get the support that they need.

Most pupils are happy at school and feel safe. They know who to turn to if they are worried about anything. When pupils report bullying or discrimination, leaders usually deal with it quickly and effectively. Despite this, some pupils are not confident that staff will deal with their concerns.

Pupils and students appreciate the increasing range of extra-curricular opportunities on offer. They express themselves creatively through the arts and help others by volunteering in the community. They celebrate with pride when their sports teams are successful in local or national competitions.

Leaders pay close attention to supporting pupils' mental well-being. For example, pupils learn about emotional resilience and enjoy 'well-being Wednesday' each week.

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

Leaders share an ambitious vision for the curriculum. They are clear about the breadth of knowledge that they want pupils and students to learn. An increasing number of key stage 4 pupils, including pupils with SEND, opt to study the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. Students in the sixth form achieve well across a broad range of qualifications.

Recently, leaders have taken steps to improve the curriculum. In most subjects, leaders have thought carefully about how pupils build their knowledge from Year 7 to Year 13. This is helping pupils to gain a deeper body of knowledge in these subjects. That said, in a few subjects in key stage 3, these improvements are at an earlier stage. Leaders are still finalising what they want pupils to learn and when teachers should deliver this content. As a result, some key stage 3 pupils do not experience as deep a curriculum as they should.

Most teachers know their subjects well. In the main, they use this expertise to deliver the curriculum effectively. In most lessons, teachers check whether pupils have learned what they need to before moving on. They revisit key knowledge often so that pupils remember it.

Leaders use appropriate systems to identify the needs of pupils and students with SEND. This information helps teachers to adapt their teaching so that these pupils learn the curriculum well alongside their peers.

Many pupils enjoy reading. As they move from Year 7 to Year 13, they grow in confidence by reading increasingly challenging texts in lessons. Leaders have carefully identified those pupils in key stage 3 who are not reading as well as they should. However, support for these pupils has only recently resumed. It has not been happening for long enough to help pupils to catch up with their reading.

Leaders have prioritised pupils' and students' personal development through the curriculum. For example, pupils learn about respect, consent and healthy relationships in an age-appropriate way. Leaders give pupils opportunities to be involved in wider school life. They learn about democracy by electing a school council. Pupils are consulted on changes which affect them. Students in the sixth form develop leadership skills, for example as charity coordinators or mentors for younger pupils.

Pupils and students access a well-considered careers programme, including opportunities to engage with local employers. Students in the sixth form are well supported in their next steps. They apply successfully to a wide range of universities and apprenticeships.

Leaders have recently raised their expectations of pupils' behaviour and conduct. As a result, most pupils behave well in lessons. The atmosphere around the school is typically positive and respectful. Leaders know that some pupils still find it difficult to manage their own behaviour. At times, these pupils disrupt learning. Leaders are taking positive action to address this. Their support is helping these pupils to improve their behaviour.

Some parents and carers are unhappy about the recent changes to behaviour expectations. Leaders have listened to these views. They are committed to continuing to improve behaviour.

Trust leaders have made sure that the school is led well. They have prioritised staff well-being. Staff value this. Most told inspectors that leaders' expectations are fair. However, a minority of staff reported concerns about their workload.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Governors and trustees support school leaders to continually refine their safeguarding systems. This has helped to ensure a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff are well trained. They know how to spot when a pupil might be at risk of harm. Staff report any concerns swiftly so that leaders can take prompt action.

Leaders have fostered strong links with external agencies such as the police and the local authority. This helps them to make sure that pupils get the right kind of help when they need it.

Pupils and students learn about how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- In some subjects, the curriculum in key stage 3 is in a state of transition. Teachers in these subjects are less clear about what key content should be taught and when. This hinders pupils in developing a deep body of knowledge in these subjects. Leaders should finalise their curriculum thinking so that they are clear about what they want key stage 3 pupils to know and remember, and in what order this learning should be delivered.
- Some pupils who have gaps in their reading knowledge, particularly those in key stage 4, do not receive the support that they need to catch up. This hinders them in achieving as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that the recently introduced reading interventions help pupils, including those in key stage 4, to catch up with their reading quickly.
- A minority of pupils do not behave as well as leaders expect. At times, this undermines the positive and respectful culture that leaders have established. Leaders should ensure that staff implement the new behaviour policy consistently well so that these pupils are supported to develop positive attitudes and appropriate self-control.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in March 2017.

## 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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135632
<b>Local authority</b>	Cumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	10244627
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1208
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	183
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Michelle Pearse
<b>Principal</b>	Abby Deeks
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.westlakesacademy.org.uk">www.westlakesacademy.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14 and 15 March 2017

## Information about this school

- Inspectors were aware during this inspection that a serious incident that occurred at the school since the previous inspection is under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.
- The school is part of the Changing Lives Learning Trust.
- The current principal was appointed in September 2022.
- Leaders make use of one registered alternative provider for a very small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection that the school has received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the principal, other senior leaders, subject leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector also met with members of the governing body and the board of trustees, and with the chief executive officer of the trust.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, art and design, science and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils and students about their learning, and looked at samples of pupils' and students' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils and students from Years 7 to 13 about their experience of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes, and met with student leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation document, leaders' improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the staff responsible for safeguarding and scrutinised the single central record. Inspectors considered leaders' safeguarding processes and procedures. Inspectors discussed matters relating to safeguarding with pupils, students and staff.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff, pupils and students.

## Inspection team

Ben Hill, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

Paul Edmondson

Ofsted Inspector

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