

Westhoughton High School

Address: Bolton Road, Westhoughton, Bolton, Lancashire, BL5 3BZ

Unique reference number (URN): 105252

Inspection report: 27 January 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.

⊗ This school requires significant improvement

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.

Expected standard ●

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard ●

Leaders have developed a personal development programme rooted in the school's 'LEARN' values. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum is carefully designed to teach pupils important information, such as how to stay healthy and safe, including online. Pupils understand risks, such as knife crime, vaping and drink spiking. The PSHE curriculum is complemented by 'Aim High' assemblies, which expose pupils to a range of diverse voices and personal stories that promote resilience and raise aspirations. Pupils receive age-appropriate relationships and sex education.

The school has taken steps to prioritise pupils' personal development. Pupils learn about equality, diversity and respect for beliefs that differ from their own. This work supports pupils' understanding of fundamental British values. Initiatives such as peer mentoring and the school's 'I am' campaign help to celebrate individuality and address any instances of homophobic or discriminatory language. All of this is helping to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

Pupils have access to a selection of extra-curricular activities. For example, they choose from clubs such as 'Grey to Green' gardening and school band. Pupils also have opportunities to take on leadership roles, such as anti-bullying ambassadors or student councillors. Through these roles, pupils develop teamwork and a sense of responsibility by organising charity drives for the school and the local community.

Leaders have thought carefully about the school's careers programme. It includes a range of external visitors, local employer partnerships and careers-fair visits. Pupils value the opportunity to experience the world of work through work experience and workshops. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who face barriers to their learning, receive additional tailored support to understand their options and prepare for their next steps after leaving school.

Needs attention ●

Achievement

Needs attention ●

Pupils' attainment in national tests at the end of key stage 4 is typically in line with national averages. However, pupils in this school, including disadvantaged pupils, do not make the progress that they should from their starting points. This is often due to variation in how well

the curriculum is delivered across subjects and classes. In addition, some pupils who have not secured essential knowledge in reading and mathematics are hindered in accessing the wider curriculum.

Pupils who attend the school's internal alternative provision sometimes do not achieve well enough. Although leaders' intentions for these provisions are clear, high levels of absence and weaknesses in teaching contribute to weaker outcomes for these pupils.

Pupils' readiness for their next steps is inconsistent. Many pupils move on with appropriate qualifications. However, a small number of pupils do not acquire the secure knowledge and skills needed for successful progression to employment, education or training.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

The school curriculum is ambitious and well designed. It identifies the most important knowledge that pupils need to know. Nonetheless, the work to ensure it is adapted well enough for some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is in its infancy. As such, the curriculum lacks precision about how it will help pupils to make the progress that they should.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They provide clear explanations when they introduce new subject content. Nevertheless, there is an unevenness in how well the curriculum is delivered. This is due to inconsistencies in how effectively teachers check whether pupils' knowledge is building securely over time. Consequently, some pupils develop gaps in their learning and, subsequently, struggle to connect new content with prior learning. Additionally, in some instances adaptations in how the curriculum is taught to pupils with barriers to learning are underdeveloped.

Leaders have prioritised supporting pupils who are in the early stages of reading. This has been effective and is making a positive difference. However, leaders' work to support pupils who have not secured the basics in handwriting, spelling and mathematics is at an earlier stage. This hampers how well some pupils can access learning across the curriculum.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

The school is committed to inclusion. Systems for identifying pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have been strengthened. Staff work with parents, carers and pupils to understand pupils' needs and to identify the barriers some pupils face in their learning and wellbeing. However, the experiences of pupils with SEND are mixed.

Staff expertise varies and support is not always adapted well enough to meet the needs of all pupils. This is particularly the case for pupils whose needs are linked to their emotional wellbeing. As a result, some pupils with SEND do not consistently receive the support they need to succeed in school. In addition, this can also make it harder for some pupils to attend school regularly. A small number of vulnerable pupils attend the school's on-site alternative provision so they can receive additional help. The school is trying different ways to support these pupils. However, it does not check carefully enough which approaches are working best. This means that staff do not always have a clear understanding of what is working well and where changes need to be made.

Support for disadvantaged pupils is inconsistent. The school has identified the barriers that these pupils face and is refining how pupil premium funding is used. However, this work is still at an early stage. As a result, the support disadvantaged pupils receive does not yet consistently help them achieve as well as they should.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Leaders have taken effective steps to improve several aspects of the school's work. They have strengthened the organisation and breadth of the curriculum and developed the personal development programme so that pupils benefit from a wider range of opportunities. Leaders have also introduced clearer expectations for behaviour and routines across the school and have focused on building positive relationships between staff and pupils. Staff recognise this emphasis on creating a calm and welcoming environment. However, leaders' actions have not yet secured improvement quickly enough in some important areas, such as attendance and punctuality.

Leaders are increasingly identifying pupils' additional needs more accurately. However, the support that pupils receive is not always implemented consistently across the school. As a result, some pupils do not receive the help they need to overcome difficulties in their learning and attendance.

Leaders have strengthened their oversight in some areas of the school's work. For example, improved systems for tracking attendance mean that leaders now have a clearer understanding of patterns of absence. There is an improved programme of training and development provided for staff. However, monitoring is not yet equally well developed across all aspects of the school's work. For instance, leaders do not always have a clear overview of when and where pupils receive sanctions, such as when a pupil has been asked to work in another classroom as a result of poor behaviour. This limits their ability to analyse patterns of behaviour and evaluate which approaches are most effective.

Governors understand their statutory responsibilities and fulfil their core duties, including oversight of safeguarding and finance. They ask questions about important issues, such as attendance and pupils leaving the school roll. However, the ways governors check the impact of leaders' work do not always give them a clear enough picture of what is working well and what needs to improve. This limits their ability to help the school improve further.

Leaders' actions are beginning to have a positive impact in some areas. However, improvements are not yet embedded and leaders' expectations are not implemented consistently across the school. Leaders and governors know that further work is needed to ensure that improvements are sustained and benefit all pupils.

Urgent improvement

Attendance and behaviour

Urgent improvement 

Pupils' attendance rates are too low and too many pupils are late to school or lessons. A high proportion of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special

educational needs and/or disabilities, are persistently or severely absent. This means that too many pupils miss substantial amounts of learning and fall further behind in their education. Recently, leaders have begun to strengthen their work to improve attendance. For example, they are working more closely with families and with local primary schools to support pupils' transition into secondary school and to establish stronger habits of attendance. This is having a positive impact on the attendance of year 7 pupils.

Leaders have established appropriate expectations for pupils' behaviour in lessons and during social times. Most pupils meet these expectations in lessons. They move around the school sensibly, behaving well despite the limited space in some parts of the building and playground areas. However, behaviour in some social spaces, particularly busy corridors, can occasionally become overly boisterous. This causes younger and smaller pupils to feel worried. Leaders have recently changed systems around school and clarified routines for entering the classroom. Nonetheless, too often, staff walk past pupils who are behaving poorly without challenging them.

When teachers use the whole-school strategies and persist with them, pupils respond appropriately. Leaders have worked with staff to build positive relationships with pupils and to create a welcoming environment, where pupils feel supported. This has helped to strengthen relationships between staff and pupils. However, some staff do not re-enforce the school's expectations consistently. Some pupils who want to do well resent this because they feel that their learning is allowed to be interrupted too often.

Most pupils are confident that staff will take their concerns about bullying or name-calling seriously. Most pupils feel that if they report bullying it will be acted on.

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

Many pupils at Westhoughton High School are keen to learn and behave well. However, pupils' attendance is too low. Leaders' strategies to improve attendance have not yet led to sustained improvement. This means that too many pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, do not attend school regularly enough. In addition, a significant number of pupils arrive late to school or to their lessons. As a result, pupils miss too much learning and fall behind in their education.

Leaders have introduced a sensible behaviour strategy and place a strong emphasis on building positive relationships with pupils and creating a welcoming environment. However, adults do not always apply leaders' expectations consistently. When this happens, some pupils' behaviour goes unchallenged. This means that a small number of pupils disrupt learning in lessons, and some pupils truant from lessons or arrive late.

Breaktimes and lunchtimes are normally calm. However, inside the building some pupils push and shove when moving around the school. At busy times, particularly in some of the narrower corridors, behaviour can occasionally become overly boisterous. Staff do not routinely challenge this. Some younger and smaller pupils say that this worries them.

Typically, pupils achieve in line with national averages in public examinations. However, some pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, do not make the progress they are capable of.

This is partly because attendance for these pupils is too low. At times, gaps in pupils' knowledge are not identified or addressed effectively. Leaders are increasingly identifying barriers to pupils' learning more accurately. Nevertheless, the support that pupils receive is uneven and, at times, does not help them overcome difficulties in their learning or wellbeing.

Most pupils feel safe in school. They contribute to the school community by taking on different leadership roles. Anti-bullying ambassadors, for example, mentor younger pupils. Most pupils feel that if they report bullying it will be acted on.

Pupils learn skills that help to prepare them well for life beyond school. For example, Year 11 pupils can explain how to deliver CPR and carry out basic self-health checks. Year 8 pupils understand how to protect personal information online. Pupils develop their confidence by participating in events, such as 'Westhoughton's Got Talent' and local competitions. The school's public-speaking team was proud to win a local debating competition.

Next steps

- Leaders should improve pupils' attendance and punctuality, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, so that more pupils attend school regularly and engage fully with their learning.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff implement the school's behaviour expectations and routines consistently, including during social times and when following up sanctions, so that pupils' behaviour improves and disruption to learning is minimised.
 - Leaders and governors should strengthen their oversight of the school's work so that they have a clearer understanding of what is working well and where improvement is needed. This includes ensuring that systems for monitoring behaviour and sanctions enable leaders to identify patterns and evaluate the impact of their actions.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff use assessment effectively to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge, including in handwriting and mathematical knowledge, so that these gaps are addressed quickly and pupils can access the wider curriculum successfully
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Joanne Murphy.

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.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff, a representative of the local authority, representatives of the governing body including the chair of governors during the inspection.

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.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing less well than it might in all the circumstances be reasonably expected to perform.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of two alternative provisions, including one that is unregistered.

The inspection started on Tuesday 27 January 2026. Inspectors returned on Wednesday 4 March 2026 to gather additional evidence in line with Ofsted inspections and visits: Deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence policy.

Headteacher: Neil Coe

Lead inspector:

Chris Stevens, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Jenny Jones, His Majesty's Inspector

Sally Kenyon, Ofsted Inspector

Kate Bowker, His Majesty's Inspector

David Marchant, Ofsted Inspector

Emma Gregory, Ofsted Inspector

James Duncan, His Majesty's 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 27 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,338

Above 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: 1,067

School capacity

1,350

Above 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: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

24.51%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

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

2.17%

Close to 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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

9.27%

Below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Below 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

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	40.5%	45.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	39.0%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	41.3%	45.3%	Close to average

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	44.4	45.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	43.1	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	43.3	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.64	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.74	-0.03	Below

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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	21.8%	25.6%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	17.7%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	21.0%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	33.3	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	31.7	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	32.6	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.31	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.21	-0.57	Below

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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	21.8%	52.8%	-31.0 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	17.7%	53.1%	-35.4 pp
2022/23 (final)	21.0%	52.4%	-31.5 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	33.3	50.3	-16.9
2023/24 (final)	31.7	50.0	-18.4
2022/23 (final)	32.6	50.3	-17.7

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-1.31	0.16	-1.48
2022/23 (final)	-1.21	0.17	-1.37

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	91%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	92%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	88%	94%	Below

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)	10.4%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	10.5%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	10.3%	9.0%	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)	29.3%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	30.7%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	29.3%	26.5%	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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