

Inspection of Shire Oak Academy

Lichfield Road, Walsall Wood, Walsall, West Midlands WS9 9PA

Inspection dates:	21 and 22 January 2025
The quality of education	Inadequate
Behaviour and attitudes	Inadequate
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The executive headteacher of this school is Annabel Stoddart and the associate headteacher is Neal Critchley. This school is part of The Mercian Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Dan Parkes, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Kevin Davis.

What is it like to attend this school?

Standards at Shire Oak Academy have been too low for too long. Pupils' experiences are very poor. For example, several pupils and their parents and carers who shared their views during the inspection are frustrated with the many inconsistencies in how the school manages pupil conduct.

Too many pupils miss too much time in school as the school has not instilled the value of regular attendance. Those pupils who are more vulnerable have especially high rates of absence. Furthermore, some pupils truant from lessons, which causes disruption to the operation of the school.

Although the school has reviewed the curriculum with the support of the trust, pupils' experiences of learning remain very weak. There has been disruption to staffing, which has hampered the school's efforts to make improvements. Actions to stem the decline have not had an impact. All this contributes to pupils' academic achievement being very poor. The one exception to this is the sixth form, where pupils speak more highly of their experience and how they are supported in their learning.

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

Pupils make too little progress in learning the curriculum over time. They typically do not have a positive experience in lessons, and the work they complete shows this has been the case for some time. Despite some recent training, the school has not ensured that teachers know how to teach their subject well enough. For example, checks on pupils' understanding of the key learning are infrequent and highly imprecise. In addition, too often teachers' selection of tasks does not help pupils to build on what they already know. All this contributes to pupils' insecure learning, and gaps in their understanding growing over time. That said, the school has reviewed its curriculum to set out the key knowledge that pupils need. Some of this work requires further development, for example the science curriculum has only very recently had sufficient focus on practical work, and the school is establishing a new curriculum in languages.

Following a review, the school put provision in place for those pupils who need additional support with their reading and plans are in place to strengthen this. This is in addition to the school's work to develop a wider culture of reading. The school is measuring the impact of its work but there remain some pupils who have difficulties in accessing the curriculum due to their weak reading skills.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is similarly weak. Too often, these pupils do not have their needs identified with precision. In addition, staff generally do not make appropriate adaptations to their teaching approach for them. This contributes to the weak achievement of these pupils, alongside that of more vulnerable pupils generally.

The curriculum in the sixth form is more established. This means teachers have more clarity about the key knowledge that pupils need. The selection of tasks and checking of

understanding are both more precise. Despite outcomes being low, students in the sixth form are well supported to achieve more successfully than in the school as a whole.

Poor behaviour is too common a feature in the life of the school, lessons are disrupted and pupils often complete little work. Pupils readily complain that behaviour expectations vary significantly between staff. There have been revisions to the school's behaviour policy, but staff remain unclear about expectations, so inconsistencies persist, and poor behaviour is not consistently challenged. The school's use of the 'reset room' has decreased suspensions but has not addressed issues with poor behaviour in the school more generally. The school's work to support pupils to improve their choices around behaviour is ineffective. Vulnerable pupils are noticeably more likely to experience sanctions.

Pupils' attendance has been too low for too long without effective and coordinated action being taken to address this. Very recently, new approaches to the management of attendance have been put in place. These approaches lack coordination, and generally do not involve engagement with parents, so they are not having sufficient impact on improving attendance. Vulnerable pupils have particularly high rates of absence.

The delivery of the school's programme for pupils' personal development is inconsistent. The school has made adjustments to the delivery of this aspect of their work, including developing pupils' awareness of other cultures and traditions. These changes mean that more pupils learn more of the key information they need. Inconsistencies persist, however, due to differences in how well this programme is delivered. Pupil absence means some pupils do not benefit as much as they should.

The school provides enrichment opportunities, such as clubs and visits, but the uptake of these by more vulnerable pupils is especially low. The school is establishing a programme to provide information to pupils about future careers and destinations. In the sixth form, students are more positive about the more coherent programme on offer, and the support which enables them to access their next steps in employment, education or training.

Until very recently, the school was placing pupils at several alternative provisions without appropriate oversight. With the support of the trust, new systems are now in place to check the suitability of these placements. Trustees and governors are committed to the school. Their view of the school, however, is overly generous and they have not held leaders to account effectively for the decline in academic outcomes, behaviour and attendance. They have not ensured that the school's work to support disadvantaged pupils is having impact.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Far too many pupils often miss school and too many pupils truant lessons. This means these pupils have an episodic experience of education and miss out on personal development opportunities. The school should put in place effective strategies that result in improved attendance, both at school and in lessons.
- Trustees, governors and trust leaders have not held the school to account effectively for key aspects of the school's work, and improvements have been implemented too slowly. As a result, weaknesses have been allowed to persist, and standards have dropped. Trustees, governors and trust leaders should ensure that there are clear systems of accountability and that their challenge and support for leaders is based on a secure understanding of the school's current weaknesses and needs.
- The school's behaviour policy is inconsistently implemented. As a result, poor or inappropriate behaviour is not dealt with effectively. The school should ensure that its behaviour policy is fit for purpose, that staff understand how to manage poor behaviour and receive support to implement the school's policy consistently.
- The school has not ensured that the curriculum is implemented to an effective standard, for example, in the selection of tasks or checking of understanding. This means that pupils are not receiving an adequate quality of education, so they do not make the progress they should. The school must ensure that teachers have the subject knowledge they need to teach the curriculum as leaders intend.
- The experience of more vulnerable pupils at the school, including pupils who are disadvantaged and pupils with SEND, is especially poor. As a result, their achievement, attendance and participation in the life of the school are weak. The school should ensure that the most vulnerable pupils in their community are prioritised through strategic developments, such as the pupil premium strategy and whole-school provision for pupils with SEND, such that their experience of school improves.

HMCI strongly recommends that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers. The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.

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	136620
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10343950
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1425
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	139
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Kevin Davis
CEO of the trust	Daniel Parkes
Headteacher	Annabel Stoddart (executive headteacher) Neal Critchley (associate headteacher)
Website	www.shireoakacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 November 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of The Mercian Trust. There are nine academies in the trust.
- The school uses 14 alternative provisions, five registered and nine not registered.
- The school has a specially resourced provision for 10 pupils with dyslexia.
- 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

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(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement 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.
- 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.
- As part of this inspection, the inspectors met with the chair of the local governing board, governors, the chair of the trust and trustees. They met with senior leaders, subject leaders, teaching staff, trust leaders and other employees in the school. Inspectors also talked informally to pupils to gather general information about school life. Governing body minutes were reviewed.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, history and art. For each deep dive, the inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work in these subjects. Other subject leaders met with inspectors and lessons were visited.
- The inspectors reviewed the school's extra-curricular activities, enrichment programme and their careers and personal development programmes with leaders and pupils.
- The inspectors reviewed the school's behaviour and attendance records with school leaders.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including plans to improve the school.
- One of the alternative provisions used by the school was contacted by telephone.
- The inspectors met with members of staff and spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, at various points in the inspection. They took account of responses to

Ofsted surveys for staff and pupils, Ofsted Parent View and the free-text responses as well as other communication from parents.

Inspection team

Andrew Madden, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Ed Leighton	Ofsted Inspector
Liz Todd	Ofsted Inspector
Ezran Little	Ofsted Inspector
Gail Brindley	Ofsted Inspector

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