

Inspection of West Midlands Education and Skills

Blue Lane East, Walsall, WS2 8HN

Inspection dates: 25 to 27 February 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

This is a time of change at West Midlands Education and Skills (WMES). An ambitious new curriculum and innovative staff are driving improvements. 'Moving forward together' is more than a mission statement; it is the realised reality for this developing community.

Pupils start at the school with often negative prior education experiences. Some have been excluded from previous schools. Some have unmet special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Many have lost their confidence and self-belief in what they can achieve. However, at WMES they are surrounded by care and ambition. Consequently, over time, they begin to learn and remember more.

Relationships are respectful and nurturing. Whether on the school site or in one of the many designated learning venues, staff quickly act when pupils need help or support. Pupils told inspectors how their tutors want the best for them and help them feel safe. Consequently, behaviour is often calm, respectful and thoughtful across all parts of the school.

Weekly trips to badminton, shops or local libraries put learning in the heart of the community. Boxing, fishing, cooking and lessons in Japanese or Italian enrich the curriculum. Visits to places such as local Gurdwaras support pupils to develop a sense of cultural identity and belief.

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

Since the last inspection, several changes have been made to the school's proprietor and leadership team. Recent changes have brought excitement and a drive for improvement. Changes to curriculum organisation and sequencing have raised expectations and belief. Ongoing professional development for all staff and enhanced curriculum leadership have increased the school's capacity for change.

The proprietor has ensured that all the independent school standards (the standards) are met. The proprietor and school leaders have robust systems to ensure these standards are regularly checked and do not drop.

Many pupils arrive at the school with unmet or undiagnosed SEND. Many have education, health and care (EHC) plans focused on social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). However, many have additional unmet needs such as learning and cognition or speech, language and communication. Very quickly, caring and attentive staff work hard to get to know the pupils well. When needed, they work with specialists such as speech and language therapists to develop their understanding of the pupils' needs. This enriches their understanding of the pupils' additional needs, their learning and what support is needed to overcome barriers.

Sequences of lessons are carefully designed to fill prior gaps and build new knowledge. Work in books shows pupils learning and achieving more than ever

before. In most cases, the work deepens understanding and helps pupils catch up on learning missed in previous schools. However, in a few cases, the courses and qualifications chosen for pupils are not as ambitious as they could be. This limits their ability to achieve the most ambitious next steps into employment, training or education.

Staff have strong subject knowledge and use this knowledge to inspire learning. They are quick to act when lessons need to be changed or when pupils find learning too hard or, in some cases, too easy. They skilfully adapt their questions to help build pupils' knowledge. Opportunities to recognise high-quality work are frequent and celebrated. Consequently, pupils engage well and are developing self-belief and confidence in learning.

The school is passionate about learning and leaders work hard to enthuse the knowledge and skills of tutors across the school. Since the last inspection, the school has worked hard to develop the lesson sequences and ensure all tutors have the resources to implement the curriculum. However, in some cases, opportunities have not yet been provided to assure the quality of all subjects taught at the school and across the designated learning venues.

Reading is a high priority across the school. Sometimes, pupils start at school unable to read or understand what they have read. Staff provide frequent opportunities to read with pupils. Reading is a regular occurrence across the school and designated learning venues. Pupils confidently read in cafés and libraries and talk to their tutors about what they have read. Consequently, some pupils are developing a first interest in reading and books.

Students in the sixth form are increasingly well prepared for further education, employment or training through the post 16 Futures Pathway. This covers functional English and mathematics, so that students have the necessary skills to be independent in the world around them. There is also a high focus on developing employability skills and lessons on job applications and interview techniques. High-quality healthy living lessons cover drugs and alcohol alongside healthy relationships. Financial literacy covered through work around bank accounts and loans develops a strong understanding of taking care of money and spending wisely.

At WMES, pupils gain a fresh start to education from a caring and supportive staff group. Staff are calm, caring and eager to develop strong, secure relationships. Some pupils' prior attendance at school was severely limited and low. Staff work closely with families and social care providers to remove pupil attendance barriers.

Preparing pupils for the world around them is a priority. Recent changes to lessons in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education have raised the profile of independence, the fundamental British values and staying safe in modern Britain. Skills for Education, Training and Personal Development (SETPD) lessons help develop employability and access to work skills. Careers information, education, advice and guidance help develop pupils' vocational vision and aspirations. However,

these ambitions are not always supported by the most appropriate vocational courses or work-related learning opportunities to prepare them for the next steps.

Leaders ensure that the school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. There is a suitable accessibility plan in place.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school does not always provide opportunities to quality assure how well subjects are taught across the school and designated learning venues. This limits their ability to make curriculum changes and offer colleagues the right support and training. The school should provide opportunities to evaluate how well subjects are taught, so they can make the necessary changes to the curriculum and further develop staff training opportunities.
- In some cases, pupils are not always placed on the most ambitious courses or have access to work-related opportunities to prepare them for their next steps. This means they are not always prepared to meet their vocational or academic ambitions. The school needs to ensure that all pupils have opportunities to access the most ambitious courses and opportunities to prepare them for their next steps.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	146563
DfE registration number	335/6044
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10342141
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	9 to 25
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	35
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	6
Proprietor	Jim Ryan
Chair	Paul Hodgetts
Headteacher	Karen Yoshida
Annual fees (day pupils)	£34,000
Telephone number	01922 643303
Website	www.westmidlandseducationandskills.co.uk
Email address	learning@wmes.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	23 to 25 May 2023

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with SEMH needs who have had a disrupted education. All the pupils have an EHC plan.
- The pupils are placed at the school from three different local authorities.
- The school is based in an old Victorian building in Walsall.
- Some pupils are educated full time in the school building. However, many pupils spend some or all of their time being educated by their tutors in local nearby designated learning venues. These venues are located in local businesses and other organisations, such as cafés and libraries. The proprietor visits pupils at these venues to maintain oversight of the quality of education they receive from their tutors.
- Pupils have physical education lessons at several local venues.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders 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, considered 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.
- During the inspection, inspectors completed deep dives in the following subjects: English, including reading, mathematics, PSHE and SETPD. In these subjects, they visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, and talked with pupils and staff about how these subjects were taught. Inspectors also looked at other subjects in less detail to check how they were planned and taught.
- The team also visited seven designated learning venues in Staffordshire and Walsall to evaluate the quality of education for pupils who access the one-to-one service off site.

- Inspectors observed informal times to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- During the inspection, the inspectors had formal meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject teachers, the chair of the governing body and pupils. They also talked informally with parents, carers, pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.
- An inspector also spoke with the proprietor.
- An inspector held telephone calls with parents and carers to gather their views about the quality of provision for their child and communication between the school and home.

Inspection team

Chris Pollitt, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Madden

His Majesty's Inspector

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