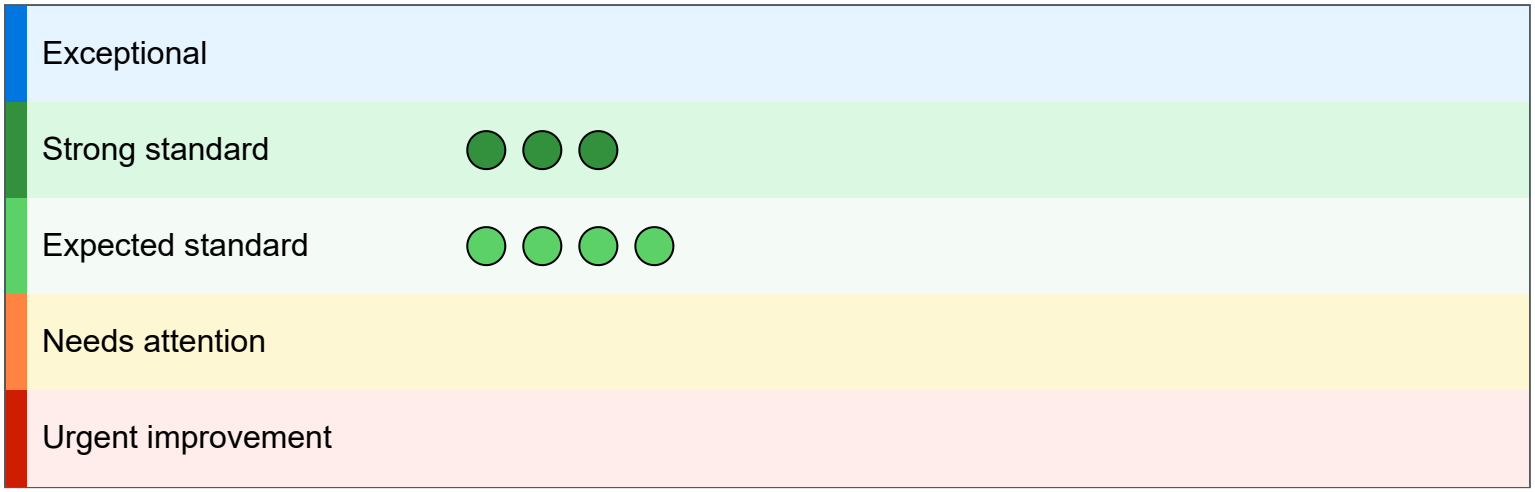
Walton Hall Academy

Address: Stafford Road, Eccleshall, Stafford, Staffordshire, ST21 6JR

Unique reference number (URN): 140997

Inspection report: 15 September 2026



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.

Strong standard

Inclusion

Strong standard

The school rightly prides itself on the depth of understanding that leaders and staff have of each pupil's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This understanding extends well beyond academic learning. Staff build detailed knowledge of pupils' individual needs, interests and wellbeing, including any current or previous involvement with children's social care. An innovative tracking system brings together this information and gives staff a clear picture of each pupil. Staff use this information to plan learning, support and interventions that match individual needs closely.

All pupils at Walton Hall have SEND. While they typically arrive with an established profile of need, staff continually review and refine their understanding of each child. Through ongoing assessment and monitoring, staff identify emerging or additional needs and adapt provision accordingly. As a result, they maintain an accurate and detailed understanding of pupils so they can ensure that support remains effective.

A large proportion of pupils qualify for pupil premium funding. Leaders use this funding strategically and with clear purpose. They direct resources towards priorities such as staff development and a broad range of enrichment experiences that pupils may not otherwise have access to outside of school. This thoughtful approach strengthens pupils' personal development and broadens their lived experience.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard

Leaders place a strong emphasis on pupils' personal development and wellbeing. The personal development curriculum is comprehensive, carefully sequenced and adapted thoughtfully to be highly inclusive and to meet pupils' individual needs and circumstances. As a result, pupils develop confidence, resilience and independence.

The school provides an extensive range of enrichment opportunities, both within and beyond the taught curriculum. Leaders make highly effective use of the expansive school site to deliver a rich vocational offer, including a fully equipped mechanics workshop, a farm and a recording studio to name but a few. Trips, visits and work experience placements are planned carefully to broaden pupils' horizons, enhance learning and provide valuable life experiences. Leaders continually review and strengthen the provision, offering ambitious opportunities such as tall ships sailing expeditions. Pupils value these experiences enormously.

Relationships, health and sex education is tailored effectively to pupils' needs and levels of understanding. Pupils learn about healthy relationships, personal wellbeing and how to keep themselves safe, including online. The curriculum also addresses contemporary issues, such as harmful online influences, diversity and equality, helping pupils develop respect for others and a strong understanding of fundamental British values. These themes are reinforced through pupils' daily experiences and interactions across the school.

The school's pastoral provision is a significant strength. Staff know pupils extremely well and provide highly effective support that helps them overcome barriers to learning, regulate their

emotions and engage successfully in school life. This inclusive approach ensures that all pupils can access and benefit from the personal development offer.

Pupils benefit from a well-planned programme of careers education, information, advice and guidance that helps them understand future pathways and make informed choices. Work experience, employer encounters, college visits and community service opportunities support pupils in developing employability skills and independence. Effective use of the on-site residential setting enhances pupils' understanding of healthy living, personal care and independent living. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education and/or employment and for adult life.

Post-16 provision

Strong standard

There is a palpable enthusiasm among staff and students in the post-16 provision following its recent move to a dedicated town-centre site. Leaders have established a purposeful and ambitious provision that reflects students' needs, interests and aspirations. They have a compelling vision for its future direction, supported by effective quality assurance and regular oversight from senior leaders and trust representatives. The site has been thoughtfully designed and resourced to a high standard, creating a mature, business-like environment where students have settled quickly and are thriving.

Preparation for adulthood is at the heart of the curriculum. Programmes of study are carefully sequenced and tailored to individual needs. Alongside English and mathematics, students access a broad range of academic and vocational opportunities, including GCSEs, BTEC and ASDAN qualifications. They also benefit from the opportunities the school's main site offers. They take full advantage of specialist facilities for horticulture, music and animal care. These provide meaningful experiences that develop students' independence, enjoyment and employability.

Students achieve well from their starting points in academic, vocational and personal development programmes. Staff maintain high expectations and ensure that learning is adapted effectively to meet students' needs without reducing ambition. Students speak confidently about their future aspirations and understand the steps they need to take to achieve them. Careers education and work-related learning opportunities help prepare students well for their next stages. As a result, the vast majority are supported to move on to positive destinations, including in further education and employment.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

On the whole, pupils achieve well in their academic and vocational work. Leaders place a strong emphasis on securing pupils' foundational knowledge. Work in recent years to improve pupils' reading fluency has enabled them to become increasingly independent learners. They are therefore able to access learning across subjects, including researching information using the devices that are readily available to them.

Some pupils find recording their ideas in writing more challenging because they have not yet developed a fluent handwriting script. Recording their thoughts can take longer than it might otherwise. This means that, despite pupils' effort and determination, the quality of their work does not always fully reflect their understanding.

Overall, pupils are prepared well for their next steps in education. For many, this includes achieving an increasing number of qualifications, including GCSEs at higher grades. This is further strengthened by the school's commitment to preparing pupils for adulthood, which is a notable strength. Across the school, staff place a clear focus on developing the knowledge, skills and independence that pupils need to thrive beyond their time at school.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

When pupils are absent, leaders have a detailed understanding of the reasons why. They work closely and tirelessly with pupils and their families to improve attendance. As a result, rates of absence have reduced in recent years. Leaders do not view attendance in isolation and recognise it as an integral part of understanding pupils' safety, wellbeing and wider needs. The analysis and management of attendance is a collaborative effort involving attendance and safeguarding leaders, as well as the school's dedicated wellbeing team. This joined-up approach is proving successful in supporting pupils to overcome barriers to attendance and so attend more regularly.

Behaviour in lessons is typically positive and calm. Bullying, including online bullying, is rare. Pupils demonstrate a strong understanding of how to use the internet safely, reflecting the effectiveness of the school's digital strategy. Any incidences of bullying or unkindness are addressed appropriately when they occur. A particular strength is the understanding staff have of how the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities impact on their behaviour and how they feel about the behaviour of others. At breaktimes, some pupils engage in overly physical play. While this is not usually the result of unkindness, it indicates that the school's high expectations are not always implemented consistently. Consequently, pupils are not always as settled and ready to learn following breaktimes as they could be.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders have developed a curriculum that sets out the intended learning across different pathways and subjects. There is a clear ambition for pupils to benefit from a breadth of opportunities and experiences comparable to those available in mainstream settings. In the post-16 provision, the curriculum has been strengthened in recent years to provide pupils with a more detailed and structured pathway towards their next steps.

Leaders recognise that curriculum development is an ongoing process and typically have an accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for further improvement. For example, they have successfully embedded an effective phonics programme for pupils at an early stage of learning to decode text. The school's digital strategy is having a positive impact. Pupils regularly use technology to access information and record their thinking, which helps them to engage fully in learning and become increasingly independent.

For some pupils who have not yet developed fluent handwriting, the approaches to improving handwriting are less well established. While staff provide opportunities for pupils

to practise, the systems and progression for developing pupils' handwriting skills are not as clearly defined as those for reading.

The curriculum is generally taught well because staff have secure subject knowledge, enthusiasm and passion for the subjects they teach, and they know pupils well. However, there are some occasions when teaching choices mean that pupils spend too long waiting to participate in activities, or the tasks they are asked to complete, although purposeful, are not as closely aligned to the intended learning as they could be.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

Leaders in the school and across the trust understand the strengths and next steps for the school. They make regular checks to ensure improvement priorities are well matched to what is needed to take the school forward. Pupils' best interests are central to development priorities and ongoing staff development and training. Leaders have been successful in establishing a curriculum that is typically taught well. They recognise that more work is needed to bring about a consistently high standard of practice that makes maximum use of teaching time across the curriculum.

The commitment of leaders at all levels is a notable strength and underpins the sense of purpose across school. This, in turn, secures high levels of staff engagement and parental confidence. Staff are proud to work at Walton Hall Academy and are committed to working in the best interests of pupils. Leaders in the school and trust have developed a compelling culture of support for staff workload and wellbeing, while providing extensive training opportunities. Staff feel listened to and valued and say that the school community is like one big family.

Leaders know pupils well and continually strive to adapt provision to meet their changing needs. They work tirelessly to provide an exciting, broad curriculum and an enviable menu of enrichment opportunities. Walton Hall is a united community, driven by a shared determination to nurture every pupil and provide the support, opportunities and encouragement they need to grow and flourish.

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

Pupils are welcomed warmly each morning and enjoy positive relationships with staff who know them, understand them and absolutely have their best interests at heart. Staff are committed to ensuring pupils feel a sense of belonging and have the support to thrive. Pupils are part of a caring community where they develop secure friendships and experience a rich, exciting curriculum. This sense of community extends to Flourish, the new town-centre post-16 site, which is providing students with a high-quality, business-like environment that is helping them prepare for adult life.

Pupils thoroughly value and enjoy the breadth of the curriculum on offer and gain a clear understanding of what they need to do to realise their aims and ambitions. The curriculum design and wider opportunities are successful in guiding pupils into adulthood and providing them with an awareness of all that is on offer to them at school and in the wider world.

Pupils typically achieve well from their starting points, as reflected in the qualifications they achieve. The school helps foster pupils' ambition and confidence, helping them to believe in themselves and realise their potential.

Pupils are safe and feel safe at school because staff are approachable, vigilant and know them well. Pupils know that staff will respond to any concerns or worries they may have. Incidents of bullying or repeated unkindness are rare. The curriculum helps pupils understand what bullying is and how to respond to it. When concerns do arise, staff, including the wellbeing team, address them swiftly and effectively.

Pupils are respectful towards each other and to others. Behaviour in lessons is calm. Pupils understand when others find it difficult to regulate and are accepting and thoughtful towards them. Generally, behaviour is positive across school, so smiles and friendly greetings are commonplace.

Next steps

- Leaders should provide staff with the support and training they need to embed consistently high-quality teaching that reflects the school's ambitious curriculum.
- Leaders should ensure that the high expectations leaders have of pupils' behaviour are universally applied across the school day, including during breaktimes.

About this inspection

This school is part of The Shaw Education 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), Kerry Inscker, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Andrew Meehan.

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 principal and other school leaders, trust national directors, the CEO and the deputy CEO 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.

Inspectors only inspected the education provision at this school.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is a special school for secondary-aged and post-16 pupils who have moderate, severe or complex learning difficulties and autism.

The school currently makes use of 2 alternative provisions, including one that is unregistered.

At the start of the current academic year, the school opened a second site for post-16 students located at Staffordshire Place 2, Tipping Street, Stafford, ST16 2DH.

Principal: Julie Wood

Lead inspector:
Gareth Morgan, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Johanne Clifton, Ofsted Inspector
Amanda Green, Ofsted Inspector
Sarahjane Cuncannon Edwards, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from different sources. More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 15 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

223

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.

School capacity

155

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.

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

47.13%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

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

100.00%

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.

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0.00%

What does this mean?

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

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.

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SpLD - Specific learning difficulty, MLD - Moderate learning difficulty, SLD - Severe learning difficulty, SEMH - Social, emotional and mental health, SLCN - Speech, language and communication, HI - Hearing impairment, VI - Vision impairment,

MSI - Multi-sensory impairment, PD - Physical disability, ASD - Autistic spectrum disorder, OTH - Other difficulty/disability

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

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
2023 leavers (revised)	86%
2022 leavers (revised)	100%
2021 leavers (revised)	95%

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
2024/25 (3 term)	9.8%
2023/24 (3 term)	10.4%
2022/23 (3 term)	11.0%

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school
2024/25 (3 term)	26.7%

Year	This school
2023/24 (3 term)	28.3%
2022/23 (3 term)	36.2%

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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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