

Inspection of Watling Academy

Barrosa Way, Milton Keynes MK8 1EP

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 May 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders have exceedingly high aspirations for every pupil at this school. They are determined that background or circumstance should not be a barrier to academic success or personal development. These aspirations are underpinned by the school's values of 'respect, responsibility and kindness'. Pupils live and breathe these values every day. Consequently, behaviour is excellent, and pupils feel safe and happy in school. On the very rare occasions bullying happens, they are confident about asking staff for help. Leaders ensure that issues are dealt with swiftly and well. Pupils are proud of the school's inclusive nature, where diversity is cherished.

Leaders set very high expectations for all pupils' work. Teachers inspire pupils to think deeply and achieve highly. Pupils enjoy being challenged because they feel safe and supported in lessons. Across the curriculum, they routinely meet and exceed these high expectations. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Parents and carers are tremendously supportive of the school. They share the school's values and appreciate that their children are seen and valued as individuals. As one parent said: 'This school believes in the pupils.'

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

The school's inspiring curriculum is highly inclusive. Leaders have thought carefully about how learning in key stage 3 will lay a firm foundation for study in key stage 4 and beyond. English Baccalaureate subjects are at the heart of key stage 4 options alongside a variety of other choices. Leaders expertly thread themes through the curriculum, which help pupils to place their learning in a wider context. Teachers receive clear information about how to support pupils' additional needs and they use it to make very effective adaptations to the curriculum for pupils with SEND. Consequently, these pupils learn and achieve very well, mostly alongside their peers.

There is a strong culture of reading at the school. Pupils read a variety of ambitious texts throughout the curriculum. Staff identify pupils who struggle with reading. These pupils receive very effective targeted support based on what will help them best.

Leaders have thoughtfully sequenced the curriculum in each subject. All understand what must be learned and understood at each point, so that pupils achieve highly. They proudly encourage pupils to think like subject experts and pupils rise to this challenge. Teachers deliver the curriculum skilfully and carefully select resources and activities to use in class. They regularly check pupils' understanding and adjust their teaching accordingly. Pupils benefit from routine opportunities to practise what they learn. They welcome feedback and use it to develop their understanding. Consequently, pupils can remember what they have learned and apply it to

increasingly complex tasks. Pupils, including those with SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, achieve exceptionally well across the curriculum.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Their attendance is high. Relationships between pupils and staff are exceptionally positive, reflecting leaders' aims that 'no pupil should be anonymous'. Pupils' conduct and attitudes towards learning are exemplary. They display excellent manners and are respectful to others. Pastoral systems are highly effective and there is dedicated additional support for pupils who need it.

Leaders place a high value on pupils' wider development. Staff inspire pupils to become confident, resilient and compassionate. Pupils learn how to build positive and safe relationships and how to manage growing up in an increasingly complex world. A well-considered careers programme is supported by links with local employers and training providers. This is a strong foundation for future careers education. Pupils value the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer. These ensure that individual interests are nurtured, and talents are celebrated.

Strong governance and trust leaders challenge and support school leaders effectively. Governors fulfil their statutory duties diligently. They know the school's strengths and share in leaders' relentless drive for continuous improvement. Leaders and governors take staff workload and well-being very seriously. Consequently, staff are very loyal to the school and feel valued.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is a strength of the school. It has a very high priority and there is a tangible culture of vigilance and care. Systems and record-keeping are extremely well organised and monitored. Staff receive regular, high-quality safeguarding training. This equips them to identify and refer pupils who may be at risk of harm. Positive relationships with outside agencies, and effective in-house support, ensure that leaders secure help swiftly for pupils who require it. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from harm, including online. Pupils know what to do and who to go to, if they need support.

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

Unique reference number	147860
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10256260
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	842
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Cove
Headteacher	Ian Bacon
Website	www.watlingacademy.net
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Watling Academy is a free school which opened in September 2020 and currently has pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- The school is part of the Denbigh Alliance Multi Academy Trust.
- The school currently uses one registered alternative provider.
- The school current provision and plans for key stage 4 meet the requirements of the provider access legislation. The legislation 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school 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 held meetings with senior leaders of the school, members of staff and pupils. The lead inspector also met with trustees and representatives of the local governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, history, geography and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also reviewed curriculum work and lessons in physical education, languages and mathematics.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors reviewed a wide range of safeguarding documents and records, including the school's record of recruitment checks. Inspectors also talked to a range of staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils to gather their views. Inspectors also took account of responses to the staff and pupil surveys.
- They considered the views of parents through Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Mary Davies, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Morrison	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Wayne	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Woodbridge	His Majesty's Inspector

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