

Widnes Academy

Cholmondeley Street, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 0EL

Inspection dates

23–24 January 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The principal and senior leaders are improving standards because of their accurate analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their planned actions are leading to improvements in pupils' outcomes.
- Senior leaders' systematic monitoring is improving teaching and learning. They support and challenge teachers where improvement is needed. Middle leaders' work to improve the quality of teaching and learning is not as fully established.
- Leaders use assessment effectively to track pupils' progress and identify where actions are needed. Pupils who have additional needs are identified quickly and intervention carefully planned.
- Senior leaders and staff have developed the school's curriculum as a result of their careful planning. The quality of the curriculum is having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Governors offer support and challenge to senior leaders. They speak highly of the principal and her positive impact on the development of the school. Governors are very aware of the areas that they want to improve in the school. They work effectively with senior leaders to plan for improvement.
- Pupils' good behaviour is impacting positively on their progress in learning.
- The strong culture of safeguarding in the school ensures that vulnerable pupils receive the support they need.
- Children in early years make good progress because of accurate, early assessment and the strong emphasis on developing those skills children need to be effective learners.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress is improving because of the sharper focus on their needs. Pupil premium funding is targeted to support pupils' academic and personal needs.
- Progress in writing is good and has improved because of teachers' careful focus on ensuring consistency of approaches to developing writing skills across the curriculum.
- Progress in reading and mathematics is now more rapid as there is a more consistent focus on what is needed to improve. Current standards in reading and mathematics at the end of Year 6 are improving and are now closer to age-related expectations. Provision for the most able pupils, however, does not always provide enough challenge for these pupils to reach their full potential.
- Parents and carers have very positive views and speak highly of the school and its work.
- The high level of care pupils receive in the school has a positive effect on their personal development.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress of the most able pupils in reading and mathematics in key stage 1 and key stage 2, by:
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment consistently to challenge the most able pupils to reach the highest standards.
- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - ensuring that middle leaders fully establish their monitoring roles.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- All staff and governors are committed to improvement. They are ambitious for their pupils and passionate about improving the progress of pupils. The principal, senior leaders and members of the academy trust and governors work tirelessly to raise standards.
- The principal has created a team who contribute to school improvement. She is supported effectively by governors and members of the academy trust in her drive to raise standards. Staff, governors and members of the academy trust speak highly of their principal and are positive about any changes she has made.
- Senior leaders provide effective support for colleagues linked to their careful monitoring of teaching and learning. Teachers, including those new to the school, spoke highly of the professional opportunities and training given to them to improve their skills. Effective support from other schools in the academy trust has contributed successfully to improvements in teaching and learning. Staff feel they have more opportunities for research and sharing good practice because of their inclusion in this network of schools. As a result of this work, pupils' outcomes are improving.
- The multi-academy trust has also given senior leaders of the school effective support. The principal spoke very positively about the opportunities they had to improve and develop leadership skills. Senior leaders were supported by the lead principal of the academy trust to carry out a review of teaching and learning. As a result, senior leaders have a clear focus where improvement was needed and, for example, put in place additional adults to support pupils in their learning.
- Leaders now have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Effective actions have been taken to address weaknesses and leaders carefully monitor and evaluate their plans. The dip in progress in 2017 to below average in the end of key stage 2 assessments, in reading and mathematics, has been quickly addressed. Leaders have taken actions that have had a positive impact on the good progress of pupils currently in the school. For example, teachers' good practice is identified through monitoring of assessment information. These practices are shared with staff and support given to embed them firmly.
- Leaders track pupils' progress rigorously and analyse progress to inform where actions are needed. For example, additional adults give identified pupils extra support to help them catch up in their learning. The accuracy of assessments is checked through internal and external monitoring. Leaders are now more aware of the need to provide challenge for the most able pupils, in reading and mathematics, because of their monitoring.
- Leaders responsible for English and mathematics are supporting staff effectively in improving the quality of teaching. In particular, the teaching of writing across the school is well embedded and consistent in approach across the curriculum.
- Middle leaders' skills are improving where they have opportunities to gather and analyse information from their monitoring work. However, this is not the case for all middle leaders.

- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is very effective. This is because this area is very well led. Pupils' additional needs are assessed quickly and resources targeted effectively to identified need. Funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is used effectively, providing pupils with support and additional resources when they are needed.
- The curriculum has been carefully developed following analysis of the pupils' strengths and the barriers to learning identified by teachers. It inspires pupils in the school who say they enjoy learning. Learning is driven by a focus on literacy. Teachers plan carefully around chosen texts that inspire pupils and provide experiences beyond pupils' everyday lives. This focus has a strong impact on pupils' progress in writing.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted strongly through the range of opportunities and experiences offered to pupils. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on shared human experiences through targeted discussions. Special books have been created and record work completed by pupils. Pupils are introduced to the wider world through educational visits, visitors and regular residential visits. Pupils' emotional needs are supported well by the learning mentor's work. Pupils can draw 'sad faces' and write about their worries. They post these messages for their learning mentor to read. These concerns are quickly addressed.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. The promotion of British values is evident in the school through displays that encourage pupils to be proud of their country and its traditions. Pupils take part in lessons that develop their understanding of these values. For example, Year 6 pupils explored the criminal justice system in their topic work. The work of the school council currently is to encourage pupils to have healthy lifestyles. Pupils were able to talk about healthy foods and explain why they are important.
- Leaders have improved attendance since 2015 and it is now close to the national figure. This improvement has been maintained because leaders have continued to monitor and evaluate attendance figures rigorously.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to support the raising of standards as well as ensuring that pupils' emotional and physical needs are met. The use of this money is targeted carefully, for example to provide early intervention for speech and language delay. The impact of its use is evaluated and actions taken to improve support based on the findings of their evaluations.
- Sports premium funding is used effectively to employ specialist support to improve teachers' skills. Pupils now have many more opportunities to take part in competitive sports. Specialist support has also provided opportunities for pupils to take part in a wider range of sports. The uptake of extra-curricular sport is high.
- Most parents who spoke to inspectors, or who responded to Parent View, have positive views about the school. Parents said that teachers 'are very caring' and 'go out of their way to offer support'. Parents have regular opportunities to visit school and support their children in their learning.

Governance of the school

- Governors have identified areas for improvement in the school and offer both support and challenge to its leaders. They know the pupils well and understand their needs.

They are clear about their role in improving the life chances of pupils. They also have priorities that are specific to the context of the school and the community it serves. For example, they want to ensure that pupils have opportunities that develop their confidence and make them ambitious.

- Governors hold leaders to account but also provide support. They say that the principal creates a 'can do' culture among staff and pupils.
- Governors benefit from the opportunity to collaborate with others in the academy trust. They take opportunities to share knowledge and skills with other governing bodies in the academy trust whenever possible. This is enabling governors to develop and improve their understanding of their role in the academy.
- Governors have had opportunities for enhanced training to improve their skills since the school converted to academy status. Governors have attended training to prepare them for their new roles in the academy local governing body. There is a system in place to allow new governors to shadow more experienced governors. As a result, governors are able to seek support when they need it.
- Governors are keen to develop parental involvement in their children's learning. They support the school's work in this area by making it an important priority. For example, the school now has a member of staff who has been appointed to lead on parental involvement.
- Governors discharge their safeguarding duties well. They have attended training including 'Prevent' duty training. For example, governors understand the need to ensure that pupils are tolerant of others, respectful to all and safe from the dangers of extremism. Governors are fully aware of their responsibilities to ensure that safeguarding procedures are robust.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding are rigorous. Pupils' safety is a clear priority. Safer recruitment is carried out carefully by knowledgeable staff.
- All adults are aware of the needs families can have and the support they sometimes require. Staff ensure that concerns are addressed quickly and are vigilant in keeping pupils safe. Pupils are well cared for and nurtured because of the timely response to pupils' needs wherever and whenever they are identified.
- The safeguarding leader is vigilant in seeking advice where it is needed and getting the right level of support for pupils. She ensures that staff are fully aware of how to identify and raise concerns. The safeguarding leader also ensures that staff receive regular update training.
- The safeguarding leader works with others in the school to create an effective team for safeguarding. For example, the learning mentor ensures that pupils in the school have access to her support daily. Pupils spoke positively about the support they were given.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching is good and improving. This is shown clearly in the quality of learning in pupils' books and the good progress that pupils make.
- Teachers' strong subject knowledge is evident in lessons. Teachers' questioning skills are effective in improving pupils' understanding of concepts.
- Teachers know their pupils well and ensure that work is set at the right level for most pupils. This is not always consistent across the school. The most able pupils do not always receive work that challenges them in mathematics and reading. This is not always the case as was seen in the challenging work set for some pupils. For example, in Year 2 the most able relished the challenge of working with fractions to solve problems.
- Teachers actively promote learning from errors as a strategy for understanding concepts. Consequently, pupils are not afraid to make mistakes and have confidence to learn from them.
- Teaching of mathematics is effective. Teachers ask pupils to explain their thinking and draw from them their ideas in mathematics. Pupils are given time to discuss their ideas and explain chosen strategies in solving problems. They record in their books all the possible strategies they could use to solve the problem. This is enabling pupils to deepen their understanding and choose the best option to solve their problem.
- Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to develop their writing and communication skills across the curriculum. In books, across the curriculum, there is evidence of pupils' writing. For example, in Year 6 science books pupils had written poems to aid them in identifying the order of planets in the solar system. Year 6 pupils investigated Mayan architecture using photographic sources and then made detailed notes about their research. The close link teachers make between writing and reading is having a positive impact on pupils' progress across the curriculum.
- Teachers enable pupils to use self-assessment very effectively. For example, Year 5 pupils worked cooperatively to improve their writing, discussing where they needed to add improved vocabulary choice. This leads to quality, extended writing in pupils' books.
- Teaching of reading is good. Teachers develop pupils' interest in reading and promote its importance for research as well as enjoyment. Pupils read a range of challenging books that widen their appreciation of books. The teaching of phonics is very effective. Teachers ensure that younger pupils use their phonic skills effectively to read difficult words.
- The allocation of more time to reading in groups with support and also reading as a whole class allows more focus on teaching specific reading skills. For example, in the Year 4 and Year 5 class the teacher ensured that pupils understood the different question types that they would encounter in their comprehension tasks. This enabled pupils to complete their work rapidly.
- Effective intervention supports pupils who fall behind in their learning. Teachers work in partnership with other adults in classrooms. This is providing pupils with the support they need to help them to catch up with their peers.

- Pupils are well focused in lessons. They display strong, positive behaviour for learning. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. As a result, pupils stay focused on their tasks and behaviour is good.
- Homework is set appropriately for pupils to extend their learning. Pupils talk about the importance of reading at home and explained how this is checked regularly by their teachers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders and governors explained the importance they place on developing confidence in their pupils. For example, key stage 2 classes all have opportunities to go on residential visits. Pupils speak enthusiastically about their visits and the exciting experiences they encounter. They look forward to such opportunities that develop their independence.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They often work without support and are keen to complete tasks given to them. Pupils explained that working hard in lessons is important. They are ambitious for their futures and know that hard work will help them to achieve their ambitions.
- Pupils take pride in their work. Work in books is exemplary and shows pupils' eagerness to always do their best.
- Pupils think about others and are reflective about life in modern Britain. They are encouraged to explore and share their thoughts with others through discussion.
- Leaders give a high priority to pupils' personal development. This is seen in how pupils respond to each other in classrooms and on the playground. Pupils help and support each other when discussing their work.
- Staff take effective actions to support pupils in developing personal skills through the curriculum. For example, pupils explore the similarities and differences between faiths. Teachers address challenging issues that pupils encounter in modern Britain. Pupils explore and learn about issues that challenge their thinking. Pupils are prepared successfully to be good, reflective citizens.
- Pupils say that there is no bullying in their school. They explained the system that keeps them safe in their school and who they go to when they have problems or need advice. They also know how to stay safe online. Pupils spoke about their 'safety officers' in school who share how to keep safe in assemblies. Pupils say the learning mentor creates friendship groups for pupils when they need them. They say the school is a friendly and welcoming place and that they would recommend it to new parents.
- Respect is evident in the relationships of all in the school. Pupils are encouraged to care for each other and all adults model behaviour that shows concern and care for others. Pupils say that in assemblies their principal explains how important it is to be kind and thoughtful. For example, school council pupils explained how they raise money for others who are in need.

- Pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to take part in after-school clubs and explained how they are rewarded for their attendance. An increasing number of pupils are attending the 'children's university' because of their involvement in after-school clubs. This aspect of the school's provision is promoting and widening opportunities for pupils' personal development.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves in an orderly manner at all times. They are polite and friendly to all including visitors to the school. Pupils play and socialise happily together. Staff are vigilant in supporting pupils when they are playing but also offer pupils opportunities to take responsibility. For example, older Year 6 pupils supervise the distribution of playtime snacks in an orderly manner.
- There is little disruptive behaviour but when it is displayed it is dealt with quickly. Pupils say that they are encouraged to make the right choices. Pupils value the opportunities to reflect on their actions and how these can hurt other pupils. Exclusions are used only when necessary to improve behaviour.
- Attendance has improved since 2015 and this improvement has been maintained and is now close to the national figure. Leaders are rigorous in monitoring and promoting attendance. They provide further support for vulnerable pupils to improve their attendance. For example, the provision of a breakfast club was put in place to improve attendance. This is having positive results especially on reducing the number of pupils who are persistently absent.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes are improving. Leaders and teachers have worked hard to improve pupils' achievements in reading, writing and mathematics, as well as in other subjects of the curriculum.
- Leaders have effectively tackled the dip in progress in 2017. Current information and work in books shows good progress being made by pupils. Progress in reading and mathematics in key stage 2 is good and improving. Current pupils' outcomes in Year 6 show that more are working at a standard appropriate for their age. This improvement is the result of rigorous tracking of pupils' progress and analysis of assessments.
- In response to teachers setting more challenge for pupils they are becoming more accurate in applying a range of strategies to solve problems. Pupils' books show current progress is good and more pupils are working at greater depth in mathematics.
- The impact of the rigorous approach to phonic development is shown by the numbers of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. In 2017 this was at the national figure. This is supporting pupils' improving reading development in key stage 1.
- Pupils throughout the school enjoy reading. Many read with confidence and this reflects good progress and improvement in outcomes for reading. For example, current data shows that more pupils in Year 6 are now working at the level expected for their

age and an increasing number are achieving greater depth.

- Current progress in writing is good. A review of work in pupils' books shows pupils have opportunities to develop writing skills across a range of different types of writing. Challenge for the most able pupils is evident in extended pieces of writing.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress. This is because progress is carefully tracked and additional support is arranged where it is needed. For example, a pupil received a period of individual tuition which improved writing skills.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress. Differences in outcomes between disadvantaged and other pupils are also improving especially in mathematics and reading. More disadvantaged pupils are reaching the standard appropriate for their age. Overall progress is now good but is slowed because of a lack of challenge in learning.
- The progress of the current most able pupils is improving but is inconsistent across classes. For example, in Year 6 and in Year 2 a greater proportion of pupils are achieving greater depth in reading and in mathematics.
- Rising outcomes alongside pupils' strong attitudes to learning are improving their readiness for the next stage of their learning.

Early years provision

Good

- Outcomes in early years have risen since 2015 and are above the national figure. Children make good progress as a result of effective leadership that is addressing their needs.
- Children start early years with skills, knowledge and understanding below those typical for their age. Early identification of need is established rapidly. Often children's speech and language development has been delayed. Leaders' careful targeting of additional funding has enabled children to have effective support. Additional support includes special focus on children's speech and language skills. The school's tracking shows this intervention makes a strong contribution to children's progress and children are well prepared for the next stage of their learning. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception has been above the national figure for 2016 and 2017. This is an upward trend.
- The leader has taken action to develop children's attitudes to learning. Children listen well to adults and stay on task both in adult-supported activities and when they initiate their own learning. Children are confident and join in activities eagerly. For example, Reception children listened avidly to a story and were keen to answer questions. Nursery children enjoyed singing nursery rhymes.
- The curriculum is planned carefully around themes which capture children's interest. Activities link to this common theme both indoors and outside. Children had opportunities to read, mark make and explore in the outside area. For example, children read books linked to the current theme of dinosaurs. Children worked enthusiastically at tasks whether they were adult directed or had been initiated by themselves.
- Teaching is effective. Teachers provide many opportunities for children in and outside

to explore and play imaginatively. Resources are chosen to encourage this exploration. All adults question pupils and take opportunities to extend conversations as they are working and playing. They also listen to children carefully and encourage them to talk about their learning.

- Children work cooperatively when they are carrying out their chosen tasks. Teachers provide a variety of resources for children to become confident learners. For example, a comfortable outdoor reading area encouraged children to choose books to share.
- Many opportunities allow children to work without adult support. They enjoy developing their early writing skills. For example, children made birthday invitations for their friends.
- Parents are encouraged to support children in their learning and this can be seen in children's homework records and this supports children's learning. They often comment on their child's work.
- Adults are ambitious for all pupils, which results in children who have SEN and/or disabilities making the same good progress as their peers. Leaders also ensure that the early identification of need is a priority in the setting.
- Children in early years behave well. They access resources, move around and interact with each other and staff positively. This is because staff have clear behaviour expectations and ensure that all children understand these expectations. Relationships between adults and children are nurturing and supportive. Children feel safe and work happily alongside other children.

School details

Unique reference number	141538
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10042418

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	161
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Ms Chris Fone
Principal	Mrs Karen Highcock
Telephone number	01514 242799
Website	www.widnesacademy.co.uk
Email address	school@widnesacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This school is an academy converter. It converted to academy status on 1 February 2015. It is part of the Wade Deacon multi-academy trust. It has local level governance and all functions are delegated by the trustees of the multi-academy trust.
- The school receives support from the network of schools in the multi-academy trust and its sponsor.
- It is a smaller than average-sized primary academy.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The school met the government's floor standards in 2017. These are the minimum

expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

- A daily breakfast club is provided.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning throughout the school. Three observations were carried out jointly with the principal. In addition, inspectors scrutinised pupils' workbooks, took part in a series of short visits to lessons, discussed reading with a group of pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 and listened to them read.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the chair of the local governing body, the acting interim chief executive officer and the lead principal of the multi-academy trust, the principal and other senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including information about pupils' progress, school improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings, information about teachers' performance and external reviews of the school. An inspector reviewed the contents of the school website and scrutinised records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the school day and in planned workshops for parents. There were 30 responses expressed by parents through Parent View. No returns were completed to Ofsted's staff questionnaire or pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Christine Howard, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Lesley Curtis	Ofsted Inspector

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