

Inspection of an outstanding school: Spring Common Academy

American Lane, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE29 1TQ

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 May 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Rebecca Greig. This school is part of Horizons 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, Kim Taylor, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mark Williams.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are the beating heart of the school. Warmth and kindness shine through as pupils and adults enjoy being in each other's company. Smiles are aplenty in classrooms, playgrounds and corridors. Pupils develop friendships with one another, with older pupils keeping a close eye out for their younger peers. All receive high-quality support to meet their physical and social needs.

Pupils generally behave very well in school, resulting in a calm environment. Some pupils need additional support from adults to help them regulate their behaviour; this support is of high quality. Proactive measures mean that individual pupils are very well supported. Pupils are safe in school and learn ways to stay safe online and in the community.

The wider opportunities which pupils receive are of an extremely high quality. Whether raising money for local charities, serving in the popular school shop or attending an overseas trip to Belgium, pupils are skilfully guided to learn about the wider world and the important part they play in it, now and in the future. Older pupils learn about, and experience, the world of work through highly effective careers education. They gain the skills and knowledge they need to lead increasingly independent lives as they move into adulthood.

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

The school's curriculum is carefully designed to meet pupils' needs. The important skills pupils need to possess have been outlined precisely. Whether following pre-formal, semi-

formal or formal pathways, communication weaves through all areas. For some pupils this is non-verbal, using communication aids or devices to express their needs and feelings. For others it is through verbal or written communication. Either way, pupils develop communication skills and knowledge well for their stage of development.

How well staff teach the curriculum, though, is mixed. Some teachers are adept at designing activities that match closely to pupils' needs. Resources are well considered and used to help pupils learn well. However, there are occasions when adults do not provide activities that precisely match the aims of the intended curriculum. This means that some pupils do not learn and develop as well as they could.

Pupils are taught to read through the school's well-delivered phonics programme. This helps pupils to learn and practise new sounds. The books they read match closely to the sounds they know. This means pupils are well supported to put their learning into practice. Older pupils who still find reading difficult read books that interest and excite them, while still practising the sounds they find tricky.

The school does all it can to make sure pupils attend regularly. Where pupils do not attend regularly enough, the school knows the issues faced by these pupils. It puts in place sensible measures to help pupils and their families overcome these barriers. These measures are working, as the small number of pupils with very poor attendance are now attending more regularly.

Children in the early years are well looked after and cared for. They are guided to develop their communication with adults and each other. The curriculum in the early years sets out main themes and topics that children will cover. Yet, the lack of precision and detail in plans means that, at times, activities do not precisely match the intended learning. Also, the early years learning environment often limits children's access to the full richness of the curriculum. The limited outdoor area and lack of physical resources mean that children do not always have the opportunity to have rich learning experiences, especially around their physical development and how they understand the world.

Pupils' wider development is of high quality. The curriculum extends beyond the academic. Pupils can access a wide range of meaningful activities to develop their experiences of life. The use of the school shop allows pupils to interact with one another in real-life situations. A range of trips and visits promote pupils' cultural and social development, along with rich opportunities to develop independence. As they grow older, pupils are able to choose some activities that they take part in during 'senior games', such as dance, swimming or golf.

The relatively new leadership team has quickly gained the trust of staff, parents and pupils. Leaders have a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths and development areas and have set about putting improvements in place with gusto. The trust board works closely with the academy advisory group (AAG) – the body responsible for local governance – in a highly strategic way. They provide well placed challenge and support to leaders to help the school to continually improve.

The provision for pupils in the sixth form is of exceptionally high quality. Pupils are readied for their next steps through a carefully designed and delivered curriculum. This provides them with the important knowledge and skills for their future education choices, along with skills for adulthood they will need. Leaders are precise in their support for pupils as they select college courses. The high-quality links with local businesses provide pupils with real, meaningful work experience.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Activities that teachers provide for pupils do not always help them to learn and remember the intended curriculum. This is because teachers do not always have sufficiently well-developed subject or pedagogical knowledge that they need. Leaders and the trust, seeking external support as needed, should provide training and support to help teachers develop the skills and knowledge to teach the curriculum consistently well.
- The curriculum in the early years does not precisely set out the important knowledge and skills children need to learn and in what order. Activities are not always closely linked to the intended learning. The learning environment also limits some children's ability to access the curriculum, especially around physical development and understanding of the world. Leaders should ensure the curriculum sets out the important skills and knowledge children need to learn and develop, along with improving the early years learning environment to ensure it is able to support the teaching of the whole curriculum.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school to be outstanding in December 2012.

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	142557
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10323760
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	215
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	29
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark Williams
CEO of the trust	Kim Taylor
Headteacher	Rebecca Greig
Website	www.springcommon.cambs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Horizons Education Trust.
- The school do not use any alternative provision.
- The headteacher joined the school in January 2024. The deputy headteacher and several assistant headteachers also took on their roles in January 2024.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Many pupils attending have autism or severe learning disabilities and a smaller number of pupils have profound and multiple learning disabilities.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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 the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, and a range of other school staff. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer, members the trust board and members the AAG. The lead inspector also met with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and early reading, mathematics, and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including behaviour logs, attendance records, pupil records, records of trustee meetings, school development plans and school self-evaluation documents.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey and Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys. Inspectors spoke to a wide range of pupils both formally and informally during the inspection and met with a group of parents.

Inspection team

Nathan Lowe, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Tessa Holledge

His Majesty's Inspector

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