

Inspection of The Spires Academy

59-77 Sheep Street, Northampton NN1 2NE

Inspection dates: 12, 13 and 21 October 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders have not ensured that pupils and staff are safe at school. They do not identify quickly enough when a pupil is at risk or provide them with the right support. Expectations of pupils' behaviour are too low. Leaders do not make sure that all staff know how to spot and respond to the signs that pupils are struggling to control their behaviour.

Staff do not consistently challenge pupils when they use offensive language to others. This includes racist language. Not all staff respond appropriately when pupils are aggressive. This means that some pupils continue to be disruptive, risking harm to themselves and others. Other pupils learn to manage their emotions and their behaviour improves.

Pupils attend school well. They say that they have an adult they trust whom they can talk to about any worries they have. Pupils are confident that staff will help them to resolve any bullying issues.

Pupils appreciate opportunities to experience the outdoors and be active. They discuss issues that affect them and share their views through the school council. Pupils understand the importance of giving to others. They enjoy learning about healthy lifestyles, sometimes learning to cook with their parents and carers.

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

Leaders do not support staff well enough to manage pupils' behaviour. They have not provided staff, including temporary staff, with enough training in this respect. Too many incidents of restraint have not been well managed. This leads to staff becoming injured when they need to use physical intervention. Some staff experience racial abuse. Leaders do not always support staff when these incidents take place.

Pupils' behaviour support plans do not help staff understand how to spot and manage the triggers for pupils' behaviour. When incidents occur, leaders do not review pupils' plans to check whether they need to be updated. Pupils' behaviour support plans do not reflect their needs and targets as set out in their education, health and care (EHC) plans.

The quality of education is variable. Leaders have begun to identify the knowledge that pupils need to learn. This work is further ahead in some subjects than others. In mathematics, the curriculum is well planned and follows a logical sequence. The art and history curriculums do not show clearly how knowledge builds from previous topics. The plans in these subjects are not suitably ambitious.

Leaders do not make sure that teachers deliver the planned curriculum consistently well. Teachers with strong expertise check whether pupils can remember important knowledge before moving on. However, non-specialist and temporary teachers focus

too closely on what pupils can do rather than what they know. They do not always correct errors, leaving pupils with gaps in their knowledge.

Pupils who struggle to read well do not always get the support they need. Some staff are skilled at helping these pupils to read unfamiliar words. Other staff have not had the training necessary to teach phonics. These pupils' reading books do not always match the sounds that they know. They sometimes guess words they cannot read, rather than use their phonic knowledge. Some pupils enjoy reading and do so with confidence. The reading choices available for these pupils do not always help them to widen their reading experiences. Curriculum plans include regular opportunities for teachers to encourage pupils to read. However, frequent staffing changes have hampered leaders' plans to prioritise reading. Help from the trust to improve the curriculum, including for early reading, is only recent.

Pupils benefit from experiences that help build their self-esteem and develop a sense of responsibility. They enjoy celebrating world-faith festivals, including Diwali and Eid al-Fitr. They learn about different cultures. For example, pupils learn about African drumming. They debate issues that affect them, including the recent national campaign for free school meals.

Senior leaders and leaders from the trust do not pay sufficient attention to the welfare and well-being of some staff. Trustees have not acted swiftly enough to recruit and retain well-trained staff. New temporary staff are not trained well enough to carry out their roles. These staff do not know important information about pupils before starting to work with them. This leaves them, and pupils, at risk.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Trustees have not met their legal duty to make sure that pupils are safe. Leaders have not created a culture where all staff are alert to the signs that a pupil may need support. They are too slow to identify possible risks facing pupils, for instance involving harmful sexual behaviour or pupils' poor mental health. They do not always make sure that pupils who are at risk get swift support. This leaves pupils at potential risk of harm.

Leaders do not have a secure oversight of records for safeguarding, behaviour, physical restraint or the administration of first aid. Some of these records are inaccurate, lack precision and omit information about leaders' actions. Trustees do not check whether leaders' responses to serious safeguarding and behaviour concerns are appropriate.

Permanent staff have received recent safeguarding training. They know they must report any worries they have about a pupil promptly. Temporary staff do not have the information they need to support individual pupils appropriately.

Leaders understand the need to contact the local authority promptly if an allegation is made about an adult. They monitor the small number of pupils who attend a different provision closely to ensure that these pupils are safe and well.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Trustees have not fulfilled their legal responsibility to keep pupils safe. Leaders do not always spot that a pupil is at risk or take swift action to support them. Leaders cannot be sure that all pupils are safe. Leaders must be alert to possible risks facing pupils and act promptly to keep them safe. They must ensure as a matter of urgency that all staff, including temporary staff, are appropriately trained in the use of physical restraint. They must ensure that all correct procedures are followed when a pupil is restrained. They must take action to reduce the occasions when restraint is necessary, by ensuring that all staff are trained and confident in de-escalation techniques.
- Records relating to safeguarding, behaviour, restraint and the administration of first aid are inaccurate and incomplete. Leaders must keep comprehensive and accurate records of incidents involving pupils and their actions to keep pupils' safe.
- Staff expectations of pupils' behaviour are not consistently high. Pupils' behaviour support plans are often out of date. They do not focus closely on why pupils struggle to control their behaviour and how staff can support them. Some pupils do not behave well and cause harm to themselves and others. Leaders must communicate a consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour. They must ensure that all staff are trained and supported to manage pupils' behaviour. They must provide staff with information about pupils' behaviour to help them improve pupils' conduct.
- Leaders do not promote the well-being of all staff. Some staff do not feel that senior and trust leaders take appropriate actions to look after them and keep them safe. Too many staff are harmed physically by pupils' poor behaviour. Others are victims of racial abuse. Leaders must prioritise staff's welfare, so that all staff feel supported and valued.
- Trust leaders have not secured and retained staff in permanent posts. Senior leaders do not have time to manage regular changes to staffing arrangements. Temporary staff do not receive sufficient training or information about their roles. Frequent staff changes create an environment of uncertainty and inconsistency. Trust leaders must recruit and retain staff in permanent positions. They should provide new staff with an appropriate programme of induction. They must support senior leaders to carry out their roles effectively.
- In some subjects, the sequence of the curriculum is not clear enough and staff do not implement curriculum plans consistently well. Some staff do not have the specialist subject expertise to modify the curriculum to meet pupils' needs and deliver the curriculum effectively. Some pupils do not secure the knowledge they need to move on and are left with gaps in their learning. Leaders must ensure

that the curriculum follows a logical sequence, so that pupils can build on what they know already. Leaders must provide staff with the necessary training, so that they can adapt the curriculum appropriately and implement it effectively.

- Leaders have not ensured that staff have had appropriate training to help pupils improve their reading. Many staff do not know how to teach phonics systematically. They do not use appropriate methods to help pupils read unfamiliar words. Books are not matched well to pupils' phonic knowledge. Some pupils cannot read fluently, or with confidence or comprehension. Leaders must ensure that staff have appropriate training, so that they can use phonics appropriately to help pupils become better readers.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	142926
Local authority	West Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10200441
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	34
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Katherine Grant
Headteacher	Emma Adams
Website	www.spiresacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This is the school's first inspection since it opened in May 2017.
- A new headteacher was appointed to the role in September 2019. Two new assistant headteachers took up their positions in September 2020.
- The trust's chief executive officer has been in post since September 2019. The executive principal has had oversight of the school since May 2020.
- The school provides education for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Some of these pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The majority of pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school is registered to admit pupils aged four to 16 years. There were only pupils aged five to 11 years on the school's roll at the time of the inspection.
- There were 34 pupils on the school's roll at the time of the inspection. This is just over half the number of pupils that the school is registered to admit.
- The school uses four unregistered alternative providers, including Adventure Ways, Liberty Learning, Seeds of Change and Teaching Personnel.

Information about this inspection

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

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- The first two days of inspection took place on 12 and 13 October 2021. Inspectors returned to the school on 21 October 2021 to gather additional evidence.
- Inspectors met with the executive principal, senior leaders and groups of staff.
- The lead inspector met with the safeguarding leader to discuss safeguarding and looked at documentation relating to safeguarding, the school's system for recruiting staff and the school's single central record. Inspectors also spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors did deep dives in four subjects: reading, mathematics, art and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons, looked at pupils' workbooks, spoke with pupils and met with teachers from the lessons they visited. Inspectors also reviewed curriculum plans in a wider range of subjects.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, met with pupils and observed behaviour during social times.
- The lead inspector met with trust representatives, including the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer. The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing body.
- The lead inspector visited an unregistered alternative provider the school uses.
- The inspection team reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' attendance, behaviour and exclusions, information about the use of physical restraint by staff and first-aid records.
- Inspectors took into account the three responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including two free-text responses. They also considered the 12 responses to the survey for staff and two responses to the pupils' survey.
- The headteacher was absent from school during the inspection.

Inspection team

Rachel Tordoff, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jason Brooks

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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