

Inspection of Cornerstone Academy

Marlfields Primary Academy, Waggs Road, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 4BT

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 November 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Cornerstone Academy is a happy, caring school. Pupils who previously have been disengaged from education thrive and achieve well. The proprietor body, leaders and staff have high expectations of all pupils. With expert help, pupils overcome barriers that get in the way of their learning. They learn how to manage their behaviour. Pupils take pride in their good-quality work. Pupils who spoke with inspectors made comments similar to this from one pupil, 'Cornerstone has changed my life for the better.' After a short-term placement, pupils move to the next stage of their education confidently. Most pupils return to mainstream education.

Pupils said that they feel happy and safe at school. They are confident that adults will listen to them and deal with any bullying if it ever occurs. Pupils' high attendance reflects the renewed enjoyment of education that they find in this school. Pupils are typically interested in what they learn, and they work hard in lessons. Pupils develop positive relationships with each other, their teachers and learning mentors. At social times, they are respectful and polite to each other. Pupils enjoy the broad and rich curriculum. In outdoor education, for example, pupils learn to collaborate with peers and overcome challenges.

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

The proprietor body and school leaders have an ambitious vision to help pupils develop a renewed love of learning. They inspire staff and pupils to achieve that aim. Staff are fully committed to providing the best education for the children in their care. Staff said that leaders are mindful of their well-being and workload. They also said that they receive helpful training to develop their skills.

Leaders provide a broad curriculum that meets all pupils' specific learning needs. Teachers skilfully assess where pupils have fallen behind in their knowledge. Leaders identify behavioural barriers to pupils' learning and any special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) thoroughly. Leaders have a curriculum in place that mainly builds on each pupil's existing knowledge and helps them to catch up. They make sure that pupils' knowledge is secure before moving on. However, in a few subjects, the planning does not identify the small units of knowledge that pupils need to learn. As a result, some pupils do not build their knowledge as strongly as possible.

Teachers develop pupils' speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy effectively across the whole curriculum. Teachers design interesting activities which enable pupils to retain their knowledge well. Pupils are keen to share their work and are proud of their achievements. Pupils talked knowledgeably, for example, about their models of the universe and their designs for a new toy.

Leaders develop pupils' reading effectively. Many pupils are unsure of phonics when they arrive. They follow a programme that develops their knowledge systematically. Pupils learn to read fluently and confidently using books that are closely matched to

the phonics they are learning. The more proficient readers develop a love for reading and enjoy choosing from the wide range of books available to them.

Pupils typically are engaged and interested in lessons. Occasionally, pupils' emotions can get the better of them. This can disrupt their own learning for a short period. Staff skilfully help pupils to calm down quickly and make sure other pupils can get on with their work.

The way in which staff support pupils' character development is strong. Pupils reflect on their feelings, their approach to work and their behaviour throughout the day. Staff model and reinforce positive choices, respect and good manners. They help pupils to become confident and resilient. Staff share their expertise and provide valued support to schools across the local area.

The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum helps pupils to understand the importance of healthy relationships. The proprietor board ensures that leaders follow the statutory guidance on relationships and sex education.

Teachers promote the wider aspects of pupils' development effectively. For example, pupils can share their beliefs and discuss ideas in a safe environment. Pupils learn about British values and cultures and faiths around the world. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Extra-curricular and enrichment activities are at the early stages of development. Leaders are currently creating wider-ranging opportunities to develop pupils' talents and interests.

Leaders work in effective partnership with the local authority and local schools. The headteacher plans pupils' transition into and out of Cornerstone Academy meticulously.

The proprietor board ensures that the academy meets all the independent school standards. There is also a suitable plan to enable disabled pupils to have access to education.

The proprietor board has a clear vision for the school. It ensures staff have the resources and expertise to help pupils to succeed in their education. The school premises are in good condition and provide a welcoming learning environment. The proprietor board members have a range of skills and carry out their responsibilities well. All required information and policies are available on the school's website. The safeguarding policy is published on the school's website. The policy takes account of all of the government's current guidelines.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are trained to a high level to ensure pupils' safety at school, including when pupils' behaviour could pose a risk to others. Staff are vigilant in identifying safeguarding risks to pupils.

Leaders work effectively with the local authority and a range of external agencies to make sure that pupils get any help that they may need. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in school, in the community and when working online.

There are thorough procedures to ensure safe recruitment and to manage any safeguarding concerns about staff if they should occur.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some curriculum planning lacks the small units of particular knowledge that pupils need to learn. This means that some staff are not clear about what pupils need to know in order to complete the tasks they are given. This hinders pupils from making as much progress as they can through the curriculum. Leaders should refine the planning so that the key knowledge pupils need to learn is explicit and sequenced to build on pupils' existing knowledge.

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

School details

Unique reference number	147899
DfE registration number	895/6017
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10203853
Type of school	Independent school
School category	Other independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Youth Engagement Schools Trust
Chair	Tony Smith
Headteacher	Damien Sweeney
Annual fees (day pupils)	£200 to £250 per week
Telephone number	01260 633109
Website	www.cornerstoneap.org
Email address	admin@cornerstoneap.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Cornerstone Academy is an independent school that provides alternative education for pupils who are at risk of exclusion from primary school across Cheshire East. Pupils do not usually have an education, health and care plan when they join the school. All pupils are dual registered with the referring primary school.
- The school opened in September 2020. It operates from two sites, one in Congleton and one in Crewe. This was the school's first inspection.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, lead teachers, staff, the director of education, the chief visionary officer, the chair of the proprietor board and local support board, and members of the local support board.
- Inspectors observed all pupils in lessons and at social times. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their work and their views on the school.
- Inspectors spoke with all staff about their workload and well-being. There were no responses to Ofsted's staff's, pupils' or parents' surveys.
- Inspectors checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. As part of this, inspectors toured the school's premises accompanied by leaders.
- Inspectors checked the school's safeguarding policies and procedures and the single central record. Inspectors met with leaders, staff and pupils to check how effective safeguarding is in the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised documents such as school policies, risk assessments and behaviour and attendance records.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, design and technology and PSHE education. As part of each deep dive, inspectors met with staff, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils about

their learning. They observed pupils reading to a familiar adult. Inspectors also looked at curriculum planning in other subjects and at pupils' individual learning plans.

Inspection team

Jean Olsson-Law, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

John Nixon

Her Majesty's Inspector

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