

Inspection of Copley Academy

Huddersfield Road, Stalybridge, Cheshire SK15 3RR

Inspection dates: 30 November and 1 December 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Inadequate

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils told inspectors that they are happy and proud to attend Copley Academy. Older pupils are keen for others to know how much the school has improved in the last two years.

Most pupils said that staff care about them. This helps them to feel safe in school. Pupils appreciate being able to visit 'The Bridge' to speak with staff if they have worries or anxieties.

Typically, pupils said that incidents of bullying are rare and that discriminatory language will be taken seriously by staff. Mostly, pupils are confident that, if they report incidents of bullying, these will be dealt with quickly by teachers.

Increasingly, pupils behave well during lessons and concentrate on their learning. That said, some pupils, who struggle to regulate their own conduct, continue to disrupt lessons for others.

Pupils take part in extra-curricular activities such as basketball, badminton and music club. Pupils value the school's 'LGBTQ club'. They explained that being part of this club supports them to be proud and open about their sexual or gender identity.

Leaders have raised teachers' expectations of the standards that pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), can achieve. These high aspirations are reflected in ambitious subject curriculums. However, there remain weaknesses in how these curriculums are delivered. This prevents pupils from achieving as well as they should.

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

After the previous full inspection, pupils, staff, parents and carers lost confidence in the leadership of the school. However, over the last two years, leaders, trust representatives and those responsible for governance have made great strides in putting Copley Academy back together. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders have maintained sight of their vision to provide a better education for pupils and restored the faith of many stakeholders.

The trust has ensured that the local governing committee (LGC) have the knowledge and expertise to hold leaders to account effectively. Members of the LGC are particularly well informed about the school's curriculum and they ask challenging questions of leaders. Added to this, support from the trust is increasingly effective in securing sustainable improvements in subject leadership and curriculum planning.

Senior leaders have high aspirations for pupils. To this end, they have designed a broad and ambitious curriculum for pupils, including pupils with SEND. Leaders' changes to the curriculum ensure that pupils in key stage 3 can now study creative

subjects, such as drama and music in sufficient depth. Added to this, considerably more pupils in key stage 4 follow the suite of subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate than previously.

Subject leaders have considered carefully what they want pupils to learn and when. Curriculum plans are ordered appropriately and teachers are clear about the content that they should deliver. Typically, teachers have a strong knowledge of the subjects that they teach. However, some subject leaders do not ensure that teachers have sufficient guidance and support to deliver curriculums effectively.

While subject leaders have designed curriculums that help pupils to build on earlier learning, some teachers do not use assessment information well enough to inform teaching. For example, some teachers do not use assessment successfully to check that pupils' earlier learning is secure or to address pupils' misconceptions. This prevents pupils from overcoming gaps in their learning and achieving as well as they should.

Leaders have ensured that the systems to identify the needs of pupils with SEND are increasingly effective. Staff have higher expectations of what this group of pupils can achieve. Teachers have access to appropriate information that helps them to better meet pupils' needs.

Leaders have started to identify those pupils who have fallen behind in reading. However, this work remains in its early stages. Presently, there is no systematic approach to addressing the gaps in pupils' reading knowledge. As a result, these pupils, particularly older pupils who struggle with reading, have not benefited from the support they need to catch up quickly.

Pupils know that staff expect them to behave well. Leaders have ensured that clear systems are in place to help teachers to manage behaviour. However, some staff do not apply these systems consistently. This means that there are times when pupils' learning is disrupted by the behaviour of their peers.

Through 'The GREAT Lives' curriculum, pupils have the opportunity to gain from broader experiences that prepare them well for life beyond school. For example, pupils learn about the importance of respect and tolerance for faiths and cultures that may differ to their own. Pupils also develop an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships. To further raise pupils' aspirations, leaders have planned a coherent and comprehensive programme of careers guidance. Pupils were very positive about the help that they receive to make informed decisions about the next stage of their education, employment or training.

Staff consider leaders to be approachable and considerate of their well-being. After some turbulence, a welcome period of stability is ensuring that pupils, parents and staff have greater confidence that the improvements at Copley Academy are sustainable and here to stay.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that there is a culture in which pupils feel they can share their worries and concerns with staff. Staff receive appropriate safeguarding training regularly. They are alert to the signs that may indicate a pupil is at risk from harm. For instance, staff have a strong awareness of the signs that may point to a pupil being at risk of exploitation by county lines gangs.

Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe. For instance, pupils learn about the dangers of vaping, and alcohol and drug misuse. Leaders consider the content of this curriculum carefully to ensure that it is age-appropriate and prioritises crucial learning. As a result, pupils benefit from revisiting key concepts, such as maintaining healthy relationships and important issues relating to consent.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some subject leaders do not focus sufficiently well on ensuring that teachers have the necessary subject-specific support and guidance to deliver curriculums consistently well. As a result, some teachers do not select the most appropriate pedagogical approaches to support pupils to learn and remember the intended curriculum. Subject leaders should focus on improving teachers' subject and pedagogical content knowledge to enhance the teaching of the curriculum over time.
- Leaders do not ensure that teachers use assessment information consistently well to check that pupils' prior knowledge is secure, identify misconceptions and design subsequent learning. This means that there are times when pupils have not grasped new knowledge well enough before teachers move on. It also means that teachers are hampered in remedying the gaps in pupils' earlier learning. This hinders pupils from building on earlier content. Leaders should ensure that teachers use assessment strategies to help pupils embed and use knowledge fluently, check pupils' understanding and inform teaching.
- In the past, leaders have not adopted a rigorous and systematic approach to developing pupils' fluency in reading. As a result, many pupils, particularly in key stage 4, have fallen behind and not received the support they have needed to catch up quickly. This prevents these pupils from achieving as well as they should across the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that they accurately diagnose the gaps in pupils' reading knowledge and that staff are well trained to support pupils to read with greater fluency, confidence and accuracy.
- Some teachers do not follow and apply the school's behaviour policy as well as they should. This means that, in some lessons, pupils' learning is disrupted by their peers, hindering their learning of the intended curriculum. Leaders should ensure that teachers are supported effectively to apply the school's behaviour

systems consistently, so that pupils can learn without the distraction of low-level disruption in the classroom.

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	139294
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	10184633
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	661
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Paul Jones
Principal	Ruth Craven
Website	www.copleyacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 and 5 February 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school is part of the Great Academies Education Trust.
- The current principal is the second new principal to be appointed since the school's last full inspection in October 2018. A new chair of the board of trustees was appointed in April 2020.
- A new chair of the LGC and six new governors have been appointed since the additional monitoring inspection in January 2021.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school makes use of four alternative providers for a very small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. Inspectors deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

- 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 met with the principal, other senior leaders, subject leaders and a range of staff. An inspector spoke with two representatives of the board of trustees, including the chair. The lead inspector spoke with two members of the local governing committee, including the chair of governors.
- An inspector met with the chief executive officer and the director of education from the multi-academy trust. An inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority.
- As part of this inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, geography and languages. Inspectors met with subject leaders, visited some lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils and teachers.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from all year groups. Inspectors also observed and spoke with pupils at social times.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, leaders' development plans, self-evaluation documents, curriculum plans and attendance and behaviour records.
- Inspectors checked on the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the recruitment checks made on staff. Inspectors met with leaders, staff and pupils to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding in school. An inspector also checked the arrangements for those pupils who attend alternative provision.

Inspection team

Emma Gregory, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Dean Logan	Ofsted Inspector
Geoff Baker	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Quinn	Her Majesty's Inspector

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