

# Inspection of The Coppice Spring Academy

Pack Lane, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG22 5TH

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Inspection dates: 22 and 23 March 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Inadequate**

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The quality of education

**Inadequate**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Inadequate**

Personal development

**Inadequate**

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?**

The Coppice Spring Academy offers pupils an unacceptably poor education. The core curriculum is particularly unsuitable. Lessons do not provide pupils with the knowledge that they urgently require. Prolonged part-time school attendance reinforces pupils' lack of personal motivation and diminishes their hope for the future.

Pupils in Year 6 benefit from being situated in the well-maintained 'Broadoaks' building. However, the main school environment is uninviting. Walls are marked and grubby, carpets are rucked and torn, and classrooms fail to convey a sense of ambition or belonging. Tellingly, aspects of the curriculum that pupils enjoy and participate in more successfully are typically those that are off site, such as bushcraft and activities at the local country park.

Disruptive behaviour and low expectations from staff are a constant backdrop to school life. Pupils exit lessons and roam around the school and grounds often. Absconding from school altogether is a frequent occurrence. Pupils acknowledge that individual staff may try to help them, but unanimously express no faith in adults' ability to intervene and successfully resolve disruptive, aggressive or bullying behaviours. 'This would not be a good place to be gay,' reported one pupil. Pupils, parents and carers, and staff agree that the school is not a safe place for pupils to be.

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

The Coppice Spring Academy, a school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, has been in a state of serious decline over time. Leaders had not identified this and therefore no measures were established to remedy the situation. A local authority visit to the school in November 2021 raised widespread concerns. Trust leaders accept these concerns as accurate and have begun to take action to rectify weaknesses.

Insufficient staffing and high staff turnover and absence, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, have had a major negative impact on the day-to-day life of the school. Currently, there are no specialist teachers for English, mathematics or science and no staff specially trained to teach reading. The substantive headteacher has been absent since December 2021 and is leaving at the end of the spring term 2022, as is the special educational needs coordinator. These and other vacancies are currently being recruited to. A very recent staff survey identifies that almost all staff lack confidence in the school's leadership and the vast majority feel unsupported. Staff told inspectors that workloads are unmanageable.

Although the school has a wealth of subject documentation and planning, staff are not clear what to teach or how. The school relies heavily on unqualified and inexperienced staff who do not possess necessary subject or teaching knowledge. Staff told inspectors that they do not feel confident to design series of lessons

across the curriculum or to accurately assess pupils' learning, beyond testing reading levels. There is no systematic approach to identifying and addressing gaps in learning, including in reading and mathematics. Leaders say that they have identified the need to introduce a coherent phonics programme. Subject plans are also under review. Leaders acknowledge that the current curriculum does not prepare pupils adequately for their next steps in education or employment.

Pupils in Years 7 to 10 inclusive have attended school on a part-time basis since September 2021. Remote lessons are available, but only a small minority of pupils participate. Attendance levels are low overall. Specialist support staff 'advocates' work with pupils and families to identify and remove barriers to education. New arrangements are being implemented to strengthen this work.

All pupils have education, health and care plans and these are generally reviewed in a timely manner. Pupils with identified occupational therapy needs or speech and language therapy needs access the support identified on their plans. However, identified learning needs are not supported well. Until recently, there has been a heavy reliance on 'bespoke provision', with pupils attending a range of alternative provisions or learning from home. In reality, this has meant that far too many vulnerable pupils were accessing too little education.

The use of off-site learning provides opportunities for pupils to build social skills and to experience practical activities. Careers information and advice are provided, but opportunities for work experience are limited. There is no provision for religious education and no planned provision for relationships and sex education. Therefore, pupils are not prepared well for their future.

Strategies intended to help pupils improve their behaviour and engage with learning have been unsuccessful. There has been no routine analysis of behaviour incidents, even of serious transgressions relating to aggression or sexualised behaviour. Pupils show little regard for adults or their peers and behave in ways that are destructive, disrespectful and dangerous. Learning is constantly disrupted. The interim headteacher is setting new boundaries and is implementing fixed-term exclusions to address extremes of behaviours, particularly when these are dangerous. For example, pupils frequently abscond onto the school roof, or abscond from their taxi at morning drop-off, only returning to school in time to catch the taxi home. The interim headteacher is introducing new home-school contracts, and attendance and behaviour policies at the start of the summer term.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Trustees' oversight of safeguarding is not strong enough. For example, when employing staff on a long-term temporary basis or into temporary senior positions, trustees continue to rely solely on the limited information from supply agencies. Even when such posts become permanent, leaders take no further steps to assure themselves of the candidate's suitability. Appointment records are incomplete.

Although staff are trained in de-escalation techniques, pupils' behaviour is frequently beyond control. Teaching and support staff report that they 'sometimes feel very scared' of being hurt by pupils and that 'staff shortages have affected our sense of safety'. Everyone shares concerns about pupils physically hurting one another as outbursts and threats are frequent. Pupils report that, 'there is bullying and staff can't stop it'.

Staff know the procedures to follow when pupils abscond, including when to involve the police. Nevertheless, regular unsupervised absence from school places pupils at further risk of harm.

The risks faced by pupils known to children's social care are known and understood. These pupils' needs are monitored closely and effectively acted on.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Leaders do not have the capacity to run the school effectively. Prominent leadership positions are currently held by interim leaders. Furthermore, there is insufficient staffing overall and a lack of specialist teaching staff. Coupled with this is high staff turnover and absence. As a result, the school does not function as it should. Leaders need to immediately stabilise staffing at all levels.
- Checks and records relating to recruitment are not thorough enough. Therefore, leaders cannot be assured that those employed are suitable. Leaders must satisfy themselves of the suitability of staff, and records should detail this. Trust leaders have commissioned a review of safeguarding. This should take place as a matter of urgency.
- Leaders have trained staff and have recently reviewed the behaviour policy to support improvements in pupils' behaviour. However, this work is at a very early stage of development and new systems are not yet implemented. Staffing is not stable enough to bring about improvements that are needed. Consequently, pupils behave in ways that are disrespectful, destructive and dangerous and pupils and staff are not safe. Leaders need to accelerate their plans to improve how well pupils behave and to ensure that the school is a safe place for all.
- Staff do not keep detailed enough records of behaviour incidents and leaders do not systematically analyse them to identify patterns. As a result, leaders do not use information about how pupils behave in a way that helps them to make further improvements to pupils' behaviour. Leaders need to develop processes that allow for regular, systematic analysis of incidents.
- Attendance is very low and too many pupils abscond from school. Most pupils currently access education that is less than full time, and leaders are reliant on the use of alternative provision. As a result, pupils miss too much of their schooling. Leaders need to ensure that pupils access their full entitlement to education and that the provision fully meets the needs of pupils.

- The curriculum is not fit for purpose and does not prepare pupils well for their next steps in education, training or employment. Consequently, pupils do not receive an acceptable standard of education and do not make the progress they should. Leaders need to urgently review the school's curriculum and ensure that staff are experienced, skilled and knowledgeable about what they teach and how they teach it.
- There are no structured programmes for personal, social and health education (PSHE), relationships and sex education or religious education. As a result, pupils are unprepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum prepares pupils fully for the future.
- Having considered the evidence, I strongly recommend that leaders and those responsible for governance do not seek to appoint early career teachers.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	141187
<b>Local authority</b>	Hampshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10229962
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	74
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Kath Grant
<b>Headteacher</b>	David O'Neill
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thecoppicespringacademy.org.uk">www.thecoppicespringacademy.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	11 July 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The Coppice Spring Academy became part of the Catch22 Multi Academies Trust Limited in September 2019.
- All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan for social, emotional and mental health needs.
- 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 currently uses six registered alternative education providers.

## Information about this inspection

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

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for

leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- This was the first routine inspection the school had 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.
- The inspection was carried out following a complaint made to Ofsted that raised serious concerns. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that had been raised. Inspectors sought to establish whether pupils were safe and whether their behaviour was a cause for concern.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the executive headteacher, the interim headteacher, trust staff deployed to support the school, and teachers and support staff. The lead inspector held two remote meetings with the chief executive officer of the trust and one remote meeting with the chair of the local board.
- Inspectors checked a wide range of documentation and school policies, including the school's single central record. They also reviewed the school's website and scrutinised records relating to the school's support for pupils known to children's social care.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and PSHE. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour, the school's wider curriculum and how leaders support staff, including with their workload.
- Pupils were spoken to throughout the inspection, to gather their views about the school and their safety.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted's Parent View survey and through a recent survey conducted by the interim headteacher. The lead inspector also met with one parent on day two of the inspection.

## Inspection team

Hilary Macdonald, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Shazia Akram

Her Majesty's Inspector

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