

Inspection of Cotton End Forest School

High Road, Cotton End, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK45 3AG

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 January 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's distinctive focus on outdoor learning means that pupils are confident and happy away from the classroom. Much of their learning happens in the outdoor environment and pupils enjoy this aspect of school. Pupils learn a range of life skills, including how to make fires and use bladed tools safely. However, not all teachers understand how to make all outdoor learning purposeful.

Pupils enjoy and benefit from the school's programme of educational visits. They also attend a variety of sports clubs, such as gymnastics, football and netball.

Across the school, pupils behave well. Pupils know what is expected of them. As a result, the school has a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Bullying is rare. Pupils know they can share concerns with staff when they experience a problem. They know that teachers will deal with bullying quickly, if it should occur. Consequently, pupils are happy and safe at school.

However, staff's expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. The work that pupils do is not always sufficiently challenging. Reading is a barrier for some pupils. In the past, staff have not taught pupils to read quickly enough.

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

Since its previous inspection in 2017, Cotton End Forest School has grown quickly and has moved to a new site. Leaders have crafted a new vision for the school. They have focused on maximising learning opportunities outdoors. The spacious and vibrant outdoor learning environment supports this vision.

Throughout this process of change, leaders have always considered the workload and well-being of staff. Staff appreciate this. Leaders have begun to turn their attention towards developing the curriculum. However, there is some way to go to ensure pupils learn well in all subjects.

The curriculum is very much in development. Where leaders have chosen to introduce purchased schemes of work, it is clear what pupils learn and when. Shared approaches for assessment are set out and inform teaching. In these subjects, pupils learn the curriculum well.

Leaders have not provided the same clarity in all subjects. In some subjects, teachers take broad aims and make decisions about the detail they will teach. This means learning does not build over time and pupils do not make the useful connections between different aspects of the curriculum they should. Similarly, where there is lack of training for teachers, teachers provide explanations and set activities that are not appropriate for pupils. As a result, pupils do not learn as much as they should.

Leaders have recently adopted a well-sequenced phonics curriculum. They provided training so that staff can teach phonics consistently. Pupils therefore learn the sounds they need to know. This shows in Year 1, where children generally blend sounds together to read words and sentences with increasing accuracy. However, there are groups of pupils in key stage 2 who did not benefit from this approach. Although staff identify these pupils, the catch-up support they receive is not helping them to catch up quickly enough. This is because assessment is not being used well to teach these pupils the sounds they need to know to improve their ability to read confidently and fluently.

The weaknesses in the curriculum and teaching in key stages 1 and 2 are not reflected in the early years. In the early years, the curriculum is well structured and children are provided with appropriate explanations and activities. For example, children's mark-making knowledge builds sequentially over time and supports children with letter formation. This ensures they are ready for writing in Year 1 and beyond.

Leaders guide teachers to put in place adaptations that help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to succeed. Teachers may meet a pupil's needs by altering resources or through targeted questioning to check understanding. These careful adaptations allow pupils with SEND to learn the curriculum alongside their peers.

Leaders have high expectations for the attendance of their pupils. They are consistent and tenacious in ensuring pupils come to school every day. Pupils are motivated to win 'Charlie Bear', given weekly to the class with the best attendance.

Governors' strengths currently lie in how they oversee some aspects of provision, such as safeguarding and school finances. Their checks and challenge help to ensure these systems work well. Governors have had less impact upon the development of the curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide staff with appropriate training which is regularly updated. Staff are vigilant and have a clear understanding of the system for reporting concerns. Leaders make appropriate referrals to external agencies when pupils require additional support. They keep detailed records of any concerns and the actions that derive from these. The curriculum supports pupils to understand about how to keep themselves safe. For example, they learn how to keep themselves safe on the internet.

Leaders ensure appropriate recruitment procedures are followed. The processes are robust and regularly checked by the governing body.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum in some subjects does not set out the order and detail of content to be learned. Consequently, the curriculum pupils experience does not build towards proficiency in these subjects. Leaders need to identify and order for teachers the vocabulary, concepts and skills pupils will learn in these subjects.
- Leaders have not equipped all teachers with the subject knowledge needed to teach the curriculum confidently and well. As a result, teaching does not always help pupils to understand and remember, and some pupils do not make the progress that they could. Leaders should provide teachers with the training and support they need to teach the curriculum well.
- Previously, the phonics programme lacked rigour. As a result, there are pupils in key stage 2 who have not secured the phonic code. The catch-up support they receive is not tightly focused on the sounds they need to know. Leaders should ensure that staff use assessment to inform timely catch-up support that ensures these pupils learn to read fluently.

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](#)' 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	109446
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10227128
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	365
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Sandra Thacker
Headteacher	Karen Headland
Website	www.cottonendforestschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 October 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection in 2017, the number of pupils enrolled at the school has increased rapidly and it has moved to a new site.
- Currently, school leaders do not make use of alternative provision for any pupils.
- There is nursery provision on offer to children aged two and over. The school offers before- and after-school childcare provision for its pupils which is run by staff from a separately registered and inspected childcare provider.

Information about this inspection

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

- 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.

- The inspectors met with leaders, including the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, SEND coordinators and three governors. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, geography, science and physical education. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, scrutinised curriculum documentation, visited lessons, spoke to teachers, talked to pupils about their learning and looked at pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- To further inspect the curriculum, inspectors met with subject leaders, reviewed curriculum documentation and sampled pupils' work in some other subjects.
- The inspectors met with leaders responsible for safeguarding and looked at safeguarding records, staff training logs and the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks.
- The inspectors met with a range of pupils to discuss their views. This included formal meetings and informal discussions during playtime, lunchtime and in lessons. Inspectors also considered the 52 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- The inspectors spoke to parents and staff to gather their views. The inspectors also considered the 101 responses to the survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the 39 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Mark Sim, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Helen Jones	Ofsted Inspector
Emma Breckenridge	Ofsted Inspector

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