

Inspection of The Spires Academy

59-77 Sheep Street, Northampton, Northamptonshire NN1 2NE

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 November 2023

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
The quality of education	Inadequate
Behaviour and attitudes	Inadequate
Personal development	Inadequate
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Previous inspection grade	Inadequate

The headteacher of this school is David Bishop. This school is part of the Catch22 Multi Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Daniel Jansen, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Kevin Lockyer.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who attend this school experience an education that is of a poor quality and does not meet their needs. Too many of them struggle to engage with their learning. Pupils do not get the help they need to catch up with the learning they have missed previously. Few of them are prepared well enough to return to a mainstream setting.

Expectations of how pupils should behave and their attitudes towards others are too low. Pupils' use of homophobic, racist and sexualised language is commonplace. This behaviour often goes unchallenged by staff.

Some pupils are physically aggressive towards their peers and adults and cause damage to school property. The school's use of physical restraint and suspensions to manage these behaviours is not working. While some pupils like coming to school, others worry about the behaviour of their peers during their time there.

Pupils enjoy taking part in clubs every Friday, including drama and music. They like playing football and competing in matches against local schools. Pupils are keen to share their views and debate topics of interest. However, their knowledge of important British values is weak, and their understanding of those who are different to themselves is limited. They are not ready for the next stage of their education.

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

Too much of the school day is disrupted by pupils' challenging, and sometimes violent, behaviour. Staff are not well equipped to deal with these behaviours. Classrooms, corridors and communal areas are often chaotic and disorderly. Some pupils frequently walk out of lessons, feeling anxious and distressed. Behaviour incidents are not analysed carefully enough to identify any patterns or triggers. These poor behaviours are often repeated, even after sanctions have been imposed. Pupils do not learn how to manage their emotions and improve their behaviour.

The school's recently introduced curriculum does not suit the needs of its pupils, many of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It does not take into account that most pupils at the school are working well below the levels of their peers. Pupils often do not learn because they cannot access the curriculum.

In many subjects, staff do not have the knowledge or skills they need to deliver the planned curriculum effectively. Strategies and resources they use to teach pupils new knowledge are often not appropriate. Teachers are not skilled at checking what pupils know and can do. They do not have an accurate understanding of how well pupils are achieving, or if pupils have any gaps in their knowledge. Pupils often disengage from what they are learning either because they are not interested or because they find it too difficult.

The school does not know how best to support pupils with SEND, particularly those with education, health and care (EHC) plans. Information on pupils' EHC plans is not used carefully enough to break down the learning for these pupils into smaller steps. The wider social, emotional and mental health needs of these pupils are also not well understood or suitably met.

Pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read struggle. Staff are not knowledgeable enough about phonics to support these pupils. The books these pupils read often do not match the sounds they know. They find reading unfamiliar words difficult and they do not become confident and fluent readers. The school has no plan in place to promote pupils' love of reading more widely. Although the school has a well-resourced library, it is not used as well as it could be to promote a love of stories.

While the attendance of some pupils is low, the school is taking reasonable actions to bring about improvements.

Pupils take part in fundraising activities, including for 'Children in Need'. They learn about important topics, such as bullying as part of Anti-Bullying Week. Trips are planned, for example to a local museum. Recent work has helped pupils in Year 7 consider their future career aspirations. However, the school's work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is poorly developed. Many pupils are unkind to each other. They do not show respect and tolerance towards those who are different to themselves. The wider curriculum does not ensure that pupils are well prepared for adulthood, or for life in modern Britain.

Staff are proud to work at the school. They say their workload and well-being are carefully considered.

Those responsible for governance have let the school down. The trust has neglected its statutory responsibilities, including in relation to equalities. For some time, it has not provided the school with the guidance and support it needs to bring about essential and rapid improvements. While the school's new leadership team is beginning to make changes, these are only in the very early stages of being implemented and rely on the support of external organisations.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- School life is frequently disrupted by pupils' poor behaviour. Staff's expectations of how pupils should behave are too low. The use of derogatory and discriminatory language is accepted as the norm. Aggressive behaviour is common. An overreliance on the use of physical intervention and suspensions is

not working. The school must take effective steps to secure rapid and demonstrable improvements in pupils' behaviour.

- The school's curriculum is poorly designed. Staff do not routinely adapt the curriculum to take into account the stage each pupil is at and their particular needs. Too many pupils struggle to access the curriculum and learn. The school should ensure that the curriculum is well designed and suitably adapted so that all pupils, including pupils with SEND, can access the learning and be successful.
- The curriculum is not delivered effectively. Teachers' pedagogical choices are often not appropriate to engage pupils in learning activities. As a result, pupils frequently struggle in lessons and get distracted. The school must ensure that teachers' subject knowledge is secure so that they choose suitable teaching approaches to engage all pupils with their learning.
- Many staff do not have the knowledge and skills they need to teach pupils how to read. Routines to learn phonics are not well established. Reading books are not well matched to the sounds pupils know. Some pupils are not able to read accurately and fluently. The school must make sure that staff know how to provide pupils, who are at the early stages of learning to read, with effective support.
- The school does not promote a love of reading. Pupils are not exposed to a broad range of texts. They cannot access the school's library often enough. Too many pupils have negative attitudes towards reading. The school needs to provide the opportunities and resources that will help pupils read widely and often.
- There is no strategy in place to promote pupils' SMSC development, or to encourage their understanding of fundamental British values. Many pupils show a lack of respect and tolerance towards those who are different to themselves. Leaders should develop a cohesive personal development programme that prepares pupils well for their next steps and for life in modern Britain.
- Those responsible for governance have not fulfilled all of their statutory responsibilities. They have not provided the necessary support and challenge needed to improve the school. The leadership team does not have the capacity to improve the school without external support. Previously identified weaknesses have not been resolved, and other areas of the school have also declined. Those responsible for governance should work closely with the school to bring about rapid improvements.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	142926
Local authority	West Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10268245
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy alternative provision
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Kevin Lockyer
CEO of the trust	Daniel Jansen
Headteacher	David Bishop
Website	www.spiresacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 July 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a part of the Catch22 Multi Academies Trust. The school is in the process of transferring to a different multi-academy trust.
- There have been a number of changes to the staff team since the previous inspection. A notable number of the staff are agency staff and temporary appointments.
- The school provides education for pupils who have been permanently excluded, or are at risk of permanent exclusion, from other schools.
- Many pupils who attend the school have social, emotional and mental health needs. They may also have cognitive, physical, sensory, communication or speech and language needs. Some pupils have an EHC plan.
- At the time of the inspection, pupils on the school's roll were in Year 1 to Year 7.
- The school uses the services of four unregistered alternative provisions.

Information about this inspection

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

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgment about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders and the leader responsible for the provision for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, art and design, and personal, social and health education. To do this, they met with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, listened to pupils read and met with teachers and pupils. They also looked at curriculum documentation for science and computing and spoke with pupils about these subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed a sample of pupils' EHC plans and discussed the provision for these pupils with leaders.
- The lead inspector met with the CEO of the multi-academy trust and two representatives of the local authority. No trustees from the multi-academy trust were available to meet with inspectors during the inspection.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses, and Ofsted's surveys for staff and pupils.
- An inspector spoke with parents at the beginning and end of the school day.
- Inspectors met formally with groups of pupils and spoke with them during social times.
- An inspector spoke with representatives of three of the unregistered alternative provisions used by the school.
- Inspectors considered records of attendance, behaviour and safeguarding, including the school's single central record. Inspectors met with leaders to discuss the school's safeguarding arrangements and took account of the views of pupils and staff.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, around the school site and during social times.

Inspection team

Clive Lawrence, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Anne Maingay

His Majesty's Inspector

Rakesh Patel

His Majesty's Inspector

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