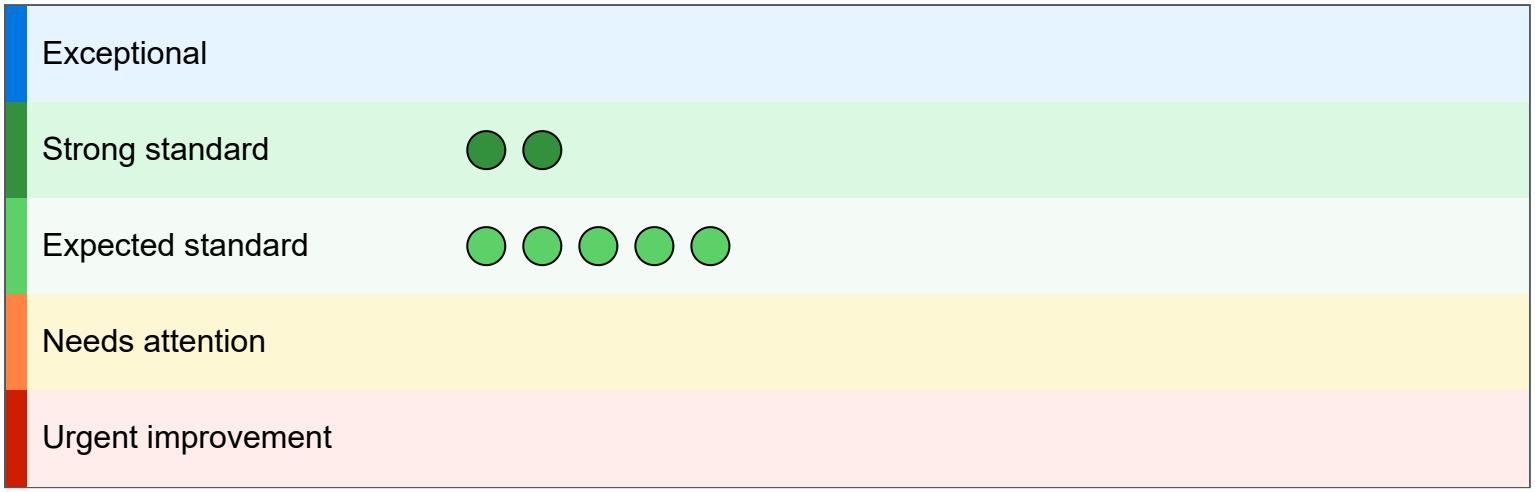
Coombe Dean School

Address: Charnhill Way, Elburton, Plymouth, Devon, PL9 8ES

Unique reference number (URN): 136558

Inspection report: 3 March 2026



Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- Not met: The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard

Leaders, with the support of the trust, have ensured that the curriculum is broad, ambitious and high quality across all subjects. Subject leaders have refined the order in which some subjects are taught. This means that each year and across all subjects, pupils build on their prior learning to be successful in their final qualifications.

Leaders ensure that teachers have the subject knowledge and expertise they need to effectively deliver the curriculum and qualifications offered at each key stage. Teachers explain concepts clearly. They consistently follow the school's agreed lesson structure, which helps pupils to practise and remember their learning. Teachers check pupils' understanding to precisely identify any gaps or misconceptions. Teaching is then adjusted effectively to address and develop pupils' understanding. Pupils with barriers to their learning receive the high-quality support they need to learn the curriculum as well as their peers.

Pupils who have not secured the knowledge and skills that they need in reading, writing and mathematics are quickly identified. A wide range of interventions are expertly delivered to rapidly help these pupils catch up and keep up with their peers. The same reading strategies are used across subjects. This is combined with a sharp focus on literacy and communication skills, so that pupils can access more ambitious learning.

Inclusion

Strong standard

There is an inclusive culture within the school. Staff are highly ambitious for all pupils. Leaders ensure that the individual needs of pupils are quickly and precisely identified. They work with other professionals and families to ensure that there are highly effective personalised support plans for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities or other barriers to their learning. The school provides effective support groups for pupils who are young carers and those with families in the armed forces. Pupils value being part of a community, where they can support each other.

Staff are well trained to provide a structured response to supporting pupils. An extensive range of interventions are available to ensure that each pupil receives what they need at the appropriate time. Staff are skilled to deliver these different interventions. They effectively support both the academic and wellbeing needs of pupils. Leaders monitor the progress of pupils closely to inform adjustments when required. This enables pupils to make progress rapidly from their starting points.

Leaders use the pupil premium grant to effectively help disadvantaged pupils with their individual barriers to learning and attendance. The school has its own internal alternative provision, Start Point. Here, pupils follow the same curriculum with expert staff, who help them re-engage successfully with their education.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Pupils across all years learn the intended curriculum effectively and are ready for their next stage of education. This is reflected in the high-quality work produced by pupils across the curriculum. However, this is not fully realised in the published outcomes across subjects. Pupils' achievement at the end of key stage 4 is typically in line with the national average in most subjects. This is improving over time. Disadvantaged pupils achieve particularly well compared to their disadvantaged peers nationally. Leaders are also closing the gap in achievement between pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are not disadvantaged in most qualifications.

Staff help pupils effectively to secure the knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics that they need for their subsequent learning. For example, staff skilfully help pupils read fluently and apply their mathematical knowledge confidently. This is having an impact on pupils' achievement in English and mathematics qualifications, which enables pupils to take their next steps successfully.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Leaders set high expectations for attendance. Pupils understand the importance of not missing learning. Leaders monitor attendance closely so that they can identify barriers for individual pupils. They work with pupils and families to provide the help they need to reduce absence. Additional support, including the school's own alternative provision, Start Point, is helping pupils with very low attendance re-engage with school life. Consequently, pupils' attendance has been consistently in line with the national average over time. The attendance of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is notably above the national average.

Leaders and staff have put in place clear routines to teach pupils how to behave. These help to create a calm and orderly environment around the school. Pupils typically behave well and show a positive attitude towards their learning. They know that there are consequences for poor behaviour, but these are rarely needed during lessons. Pupils like it when staff are consistent with their high expectations because it makes them feel safe and cared for. Pupils know that bullying and discrimination is not acceptable. When reported, adults support pupils to resolve issues swiftly. When pupils need additional support or adaptations to improve their behaviour this is provided.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

School and trust leaders, along with those responsible for governance, have a clear ambition to provide a high-quality education for all pupils. Leaders at all levels act with integrity and in the best interest of children. They have identified and prioritised areas for improvement. The actions that leaders have taken are having a positive impact. For example, the tenacious work to improve the quality of curriculum and teaching has raised standards quickly. Parents and carers are positive about the school and feel able to share their views with leaders.

Leaders have created a culture of support and professional growth for staff. Leaders act as role models and are considerate of the workload and wellbeing of staff. Ongoing professional learning and development is a high priority for all staff but especially those at the early stages of their career. These opportunities make staff feel valued.

The trust has recently revised how the trustees and the local governing committees work together to provide both challenge and support. During this period of transition, the trust has ensured that those responsible for governance meet all their statutory duties. For example, they have retained a sharp focus on academic attainment and ensured robust safeguarding practices are in place. However, governance has not applied the same robust oversight and challenge to all aspects of the school's work.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders have designed a personal, social and health curriculum that prepares pupils well for adult life. There is an age-appropriate coverage of topics, such as healthy relationships, mental health and risks to their wellbeing. As a result, pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, including online. Leaders adapt this curriculum to reflect the changing risks to pupils in the local context. For example, helping pupils to understand the risks of AI generated images.

Across the curriculum and through the tutor and assembly programme, there are opportunities for pupils to learn about different cultures and religions. Pupils understand the importance of respecting others and know why fundamental British values are important to society. However, some pupils find it difficult to recall their learning over time. Pupils are keen for more opportunities to debate and discuss their learning to deepen their understanding.

The careers provision is a strength of the school. Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to learn about the world of work and meet employers. Pupils recognise the employability skills they learned from work experience. Pupils value the impartial advice they have about education and apprenticeship routes. This is raising pupils' aspirations for the future.

The school provides a range of extra-curricular opportunities, such as clubs, trips and workshops. Pupils are proud to represent the school in competitions. Trips, such as to the coast, bring the curriculum to life for pupils. Leaders track who has taken part in these so that they can further increase the engagement of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged. Consequently, more pupils are benefiting from this offer. In addition, pupils learn the importance of being active citizens through volunteering, organising community events and charity fundraising.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard

Leaders ensure that the post-16 curriculum is delivered to the same high standard as the other key stages. Students study a suite of academic and vocational qualifications that match their future aspirations. Teachers employ highly effective strategies to support students to successfully learn the curriculum. This includes students with barriers to their learning. Students produce high-quality work and appreciate how staff help them to make improvements. The published outcomes have improved over time with students now

achieving in line with the national average. In the most recent published outcomes, students made above national progress from their starting points.

The personal development programme includes work experience, careers guidance and age-appropriate health and relationships education. Students act as role models for younger pupils. For example, they run extra-curricular activities and lead ‘The Senate’, the school’s student council. Students are particularly complimentary about the high expectations set for their behaviour and attendance. They view this as a sign of how staff both care about them and want them to be successful. These wider opportunities mean that pupils are well prepared for future employment, education and adult life.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

The Coombe Dean School's values of community, integrity and opportunity are well understood by pupils. Pupils and staff share warm, respectful relationships with other members of the school community. Pupils feel cared for, which makes them feel safe. Older pupils and sixth-form students act as role models for younger pupils. For example, they run music clubs and volunteer as sports leaders. Members of the school council, ‘The Senate’, are proud of their role in making the school a better place for all.

Pupils understand their responsibilities for behaving well. The clear routines and high expectations for behaviour mean that pupils can learn without disruption. On the rare occasion that bullying occurs, it is dealt with swiftly. It is clearly not tolerated. A wide range of extra-curricular opportunities help pupils to develop their talents and interests. For example, they can join music and drama clubs or sport teams. This focus on developing pupils as citizens means that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Leaders have created a school culture, where all staff work together to support pupils. Pupils’ individual barriers for either their learning or wellbeing are carefully identified. Swift and well-matched support is then provided for these pupils. The high-quality pastoral and academic support mean that pupils overcome their individual challenges to be successful in their learning.

Pupils of all ages enjoy their learning and understand the importance of attending well. The high-quality curriculum and effective teaching they receive across the curriculum means that they are successful in their chosen qualifications. Pupils particularly value the individual careers information and guidance they receive to help them with their future aspirations. This means that pupils move successfully to their chosen education, employment or training destinations.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the personal development curriculum enables pupils to recall their learning about relationships, healthy lifestyles, cultures and religions, so that they are well prepared for adult life.

- Leaders should further embed the effective teaching strategies they have introduced, so that pupils' achievement continues to rise.
- Those responsible for governance should ensure that they robustly support and challenge leaders across all aspects of the school's work.

About this inspection

The school is part of the Westcountry Schools Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Nat Parnell, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Carl Atkinson.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with school senior and middle leaders. Inspectors also spoke with teaching staff, support staff, trust executive leaders and representatives of the local governing committee and board of trustees.

Access legislation:

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school uses no alternative provision.

Headteacher : Caroline Granville

Lead inspector:
Sara Berry, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Gary Lewis, Ofsted Inspector
Matthew Collins, Ofsted Inspector
Richard Barnes, Ofsted Inspector
Sophie Laing, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

This data is from 3 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,003
Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,180
Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

20.71%
Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

3.89%
Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

12.26%
Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	48.5%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	53.3%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	39.9%	45.3%	Close to average

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	49.2	46.0	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	48.6	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	45.1	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	0.16	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.01	-0.03	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	40.0%	25.8%	Above
2023/24 (final)	20.0%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	27.6%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	41.7	34.9	Above
2023/24 (final)	38.4	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	38.8	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.48	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.12	-0.57	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	40.0%	53.1%	-13.1 pp
2023/24 (final)	20.0%	53.1%	-33.1 pp
2022/23 (final)	27.6%	52.4%	-24.8 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	41.7	50.4	-8.7
2023/24 (final)	38.4	50.0	-11.6
2022/23 (final)	38.8	50.3	-11.5

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.48	0.16	-0.64
2022/23 (final)	-0.12	0.17	-0.28

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	91%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	94%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	97%	94%	Average

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	34.81	34.99	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	30.25	34.38	Below
2022/23 (final)	26.96	34.16	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	0.2	0.0	Above
2023/24 (revised)	-0.1	0.0	Close to average

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	7.8%	8.1%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	8.9%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	8.4%	9.0%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	22.7%	21.9%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	25.5%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	26.7%	26.5%	Close to average

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement 🔴

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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