

Inspection of Cornerstone Academy

The Stables, Warmingham Road, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 4PP

Inspection dates: 3 to 5 June 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Attending this school is a life-changing experience. Most pupils have previously had negative experiences of education. The care and support that staff give pupils when they arrive helps them to overcome their lack of trust in schools. For many pupils, this transforms their attitudes to learning and their future life chances.

The school has high expectations of all pupils. Staff have a good understanding of each pupil and their individual needs. The school provides support, specific to each pupil. In class, pupils engage and are enthusiastic about their learning. Most pupils arrive with significant gaps in their knowledge. However, they make great strides in their social development and behaviour. This enables pupils to make the smooth transition back into a mainstream setting or a specialist provision when the time is right.

Pupils benefit from highly positive relationships with staff, consistent routines and praise. They understand what the school expects from them. This helps them to feel safe, secure and to thrive. The atmosphere around school is warm, calm and purposeful. Pupils are routinely supported to understand their emotions. They demonstrate positive behaviour in class and around the school. Pupils attend daily and cannot wait to see what the day holds. Whether that be time spent together with their friends in class or trips out to local places of cultural interest.

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

All involved in the school, including the proprietor, have a clear vision for excellence. The school and staff work well with the local authority, and other local schools, to ensure that pupils' needs are met. Together, they are passionate about improving the lives of pupils.

Relationships sit at the heart of this vision. Pupils learn to interact and socialise well with staff and each other. They learn how to support one another, which contributes to the positive environment around the school. Many pupils who attend the school have previously had significant time away from education. Some are anxious about being in a school setting because of their prior experiences. The school works closely with pupils and their families to support increased attendance. The impact of this work is extraordinary. Attendance is highly impressive.

There is a thorough induction period for pupils, which includes the voice of the child and their family. Staff have the expertise and knowledge to accurately identify pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Together with information about their likes, dislikes and home life, the school creates bespoke programmes of support for each pupil. As a result, pupils with SEND achieve well.

Since the last inspection, the school has made sure that the curriculum extends beyond English and mathematics. It has developed a curriculum which accommodates the breadth of the national curriculum and suits the mixed-aged

classes within the school. The key knowledge and skills that pupils should be taught from Year 1 to Year 6 is clear and builds logically. However, in some subjects, staff have not had sufficient time to get to grips with the important knowledge for pupils to learn and how it builds over time. This means that teaching does not always link what pupils are learning to what they already know. As a result, this limits the depth of knowledge that pupils have and their ability to talk with confidence about their learning across the curriculum.

Staff deliver the curriculum in an exciting and engaging way. This helps to focus pupils' attention and sparks their interest. Pupils have suitable resources which promote their independence and enable them to feel successful. For pupils in the early stages of reading, a suitable phonics programme is utilised. Timely checks identify any gaps pupils may have in their reading knowledge. Staff are quick to address these so that most pupils read with confidence and skill.

Reading is prioritised throughout the school. There are daily opportunities for pupils to read their own books whether that be in a cosy reading corner or in the outdoor teepee. However, there are very few taught opportunities for pupils to read and enjoy a variety of texts. Consequently, pupils do not benefit from regular high-quality books being shared with them to ignite their interest. As a result, pupils do not develop a rich vocabulary that they could use in their writing.

The school provides opportunities for pupils to develop themselves personally and socially. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next steps in education and their lives beyond school. The Friday enrichment afternoons are a recent addition which promote activities such as chess, art and crafts. Pupils enjoy the outdoor education offer. For example, they spend quality time with their friends around the newly installed fire pit. This is where they successfully build relationships with their peers and develop essential social skills.

The school and proprietor have the commitment of staff. They show high levels of pride in their work and feel valued. Workload and well-being are prioritised. The proprietor has a strong oversight of the work of the school. The systems and processes in place help ensure that the school securely and consistently meets the independent school standards (the standards). The high-quality premises, accommodation and resources provide a calm and welcoming learning environment. The staff have a wealth of expertise to support pupils with SEND and behavioural challenges. The school meets the statutory requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school's newly introduced curriculums have not had time to fully embed. This means that staff are not secure in the essential knowledge that pupils should learn and how it builds over time. This can hamper how well pupils build knowledge securely over time in some subjects. The school should ensure that staff have the knowledge and expertise to deliver the curriculum with clarity and confidence.
- The school has a limited selection of book choices to support the delivery of the curriculum. As a result, pupils do not benefit from high-quality texts to broaden their vocabulary and support their writing. At times, this can hinder how well pupils achieve. The school should ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of texts to support the delivery of the curriculum.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	147899
DfE registration number	895/6017
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10342163
Type of school	Independent school
School category	Other independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	21
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Youth Engagement Trust
Chair	Nic Brindle and Rob Hallsall
Headteacher	Damien Sweeney
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10,450 to £12,540 per annum
Telephone number	01270 304094
Website	www.cornerstoneap.org
Email address	admin@cornerstoneap.org
Date of previous inspection	16 to 18 November 2021

Information about this school

- Cornerstone Academy is an independent school that provides alternative education for pupils who are at risk of exclusion from primary schools across Cheshire East. All pupils are dual registered with the referring primary school. A small number of pupils have an education, health and care plan when they join the school. Pupils who attend the school typically have social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school's previous standard inspection was conducted from 16 to 18 November 2021. The school received a material change inspection on the 12 January 2023.
- The school operates from two premises: Cornerstone House, 26 Crewe Road, Sandbach, Cheshire CW11 4NE and The Stables, Warmingham Road, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 4PP.
- The school is registered to admit up to 20 pupils. It is currently operating outside its registration agreement. There are 21 pupils on the school roll across both premises.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- During the inspection, inspectors met with the headteacher, representatives of the proprietor body, other members of the leadership team and a range of school staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, including early reading, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke to school leaders about the curriculum and looked at curriculum plans in a range of other subjects.

- Inspectors spoke with a range of external partners including representatives of the local authority and headteachers who currently, or have recently, placed pupils at the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central register; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They met with parents and carers at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online pupil surveys. They spoke with some pupils about school life.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff surveys. Inspectors spoke with a range of staff to discuss the support that they receive from the school.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school.
- An inspector made a tour of the premises.
- Inspectors viewed a range of evidence to evaluate the proprietor's compliance with the standards.

Inspection team

Sue Dymond, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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