

Inspection of Sponne School

Brackley Road, Towcester, Northamptonshire NN12 6DJ

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 January 2025

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is Graham Forbes. The school is part of Tove Learning 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), Jamie Clarke, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Christopher Watt.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since October 2012. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are rightfully proud of their school. The school strives to live out its 'dream, believe, achieve' values daily. Pupils are respectful and welcoming. Relationships are polite and cooperative. Pupils appreciate the calm and orderly ethos across the school. Pastoral care is strong, as is staff's work to promote pupils' welfare. Pupils are happy and safe. They know who to turn to if they have any worries. They are cared for very well.

The majority of pupils behave well. Bullying is rare. The school deals with it appropriately when it occurs. The school sets high expectations. Pupils learn well and achieve highly.

Sixth-form students gain from a range of purposeful opportunities that fully support their personal development. They value the support that they receive. Older students serve as positive role models for younger pupils.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, including a variety of sporting and performance activities. Pupils gain from many memorable experiences, including trips and overseas residential visits.

Most parents and carers have positive views about the school. They value the school's inclusive and supportive culture. They recognise the school's strengths including its musical life that is quite exceptional. However, some parents do not fully understand the school's expectations of their children.

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

Leaders, including those with responsibility for governance, lead with a shared vision and strong moral purpose. They know the school's strengths and what needs improving. The trust provides appropriate support and challenge. However, the school is less effective in addressing the barriers faced by some disadvantaged pupils.

The quality of education is good. The school's curriculum includes a range of subjects that prepares pupils well for their next stages in learning. Subject curriculums reflect the goals of the national curriculum in key stage 3. The school's curriculum for Year 9 pupils serves as an ambitious transition year to Years 10 and 11. Key stage 4 pupils are provided with a range of opportunities to gain qualifications in subjects that reflect national expectations. The school's end of Year 11 published outcomes for 2024 were very positive, particularly in science and mathematics.

The school ensures that subject curriculums identify the key knowledge that pupils must learn and when. Pupils are supported well to build learning over time. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They check on pupils' understanding to ensure that learning is embedded. For example, in English, pupils build on their interpretation of literature, including poetry, during their time at the school. They benefit from a strong focus on storytelling and they build vocabulary well over time. In art, younger pupils gain key knowledge about artists and periods of art. They develop sophisticated skills through the use of different media and techniques. The school has prioritised reading. Pupils who

struggle to read are given additional support to become confident and fluent readers. A strong culture of reading is being nurtured.

The school supports pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. These pupils' needs are accurately identified. Teachers adapt teaching to enable pupils with SEND to access the same curriculum as their peers. Most parents of pupils with SEND value the support provided by the school.

Pupils' behaviour is positive. Higher expectations of behaviour and attitudes to learning are being set by leaders. The vast majority of pupils engage well with their learning. Pupils' overall attendance is positive. The school's robust attendance systems have brought about sustained improvement in attendance since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The school's provision for pupils' personal development is a significant strength. The personal, social and health education curriculum is carefully structured. Pupils gain a sound understanding about physical and mental health. They learn about age-appropriate relationships and sex education. They deepen their understanding of right and wrong. Careers provision is very strong. Pupils receive appropriate advice and guidance. They are prepared well for their next steps. The school offers an extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities and experiences. Pupils value the range of leadership roles available.

The school sets high expectations of sixth-form students. Students apply themselves purposefully. They are taught by knowledgeable and skilled staff. Students benefit from a wide range of subjects that are offered. The school provides excellent opportunities for students' personal development and work-related learning. Students are proud to be part of the sixth form.

Overwhelmingly, staff are very positive about the school. They value and appreciate professional development opportunities. Leaders are considerate of staff workload. Staff morale is positive and they are proud to be part of the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's focus on disadvantaged pupils is not as sharp as it needs to be. As a result, the barriers faced by these pupils are not as effectively addressed as they might be and some do not achieve as well as they could in some subjects. The school needs to ensure that provision for disadvantaged pupils enables these pupils to learn at least as well as their peers.
- The school's high aspirations and expectations have not been communicated successfully to some parents. As a result, some parents do not fully understand the

reasons for, and the benefits of, the school's expectations and provision. The school should ensure that parents understand its expectations, thus enabling parents to support the school's work in providing for their children's education.

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	136488
Local authority	West Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10347506
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,423
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	267
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Christopher Watt
CEO of the trust	Jamie Clarke
Headteacher	Graham Forbes
Website	www.sponne.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	22 and 23 October 2012, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of Tove Learning Trust. The trust delegates some of its responsibilities to a local governing body.
- The headteacher took up post in September 2024.
- The school uses five unregistered providers of alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and trust officers. The lead inspector met with representatives of the trustees and local governing body, including the chairs of trustees and governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, art and photography, history and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited sample lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work.
- Inspectors considered the curriculum and visited lessons in a range of other subjects, including, science, geography, design and technology, computing, drama, psychology, music and modern foreign languages.
- To review the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account 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 views of parents submitted via Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. They considered correspondence received during the inspection. They reviewed responses to Ofsted's surveys of school staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Chris Davies, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Shazia Lydon	Ofsted Inspector
Jo Ward	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Monk	Ofsted Inspector
Nik Patel	Ofsted Inspector

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