

Inspection of Spring Common Academy

American Lane, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE29 1TQ

Inspection dates:	17 and 18 June 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Sixth-form provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is Rebecca Greig. This school is part of Horizons Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the interim chief executive officer (CEO), Jane Nolan, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Julie Perry.

Ofsted has not previously inspected Spring Common Academy under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged Spring Common School to be outstanding for overall effectiveness, before it opened as Spring Common Academy as a result of conversion to academy status. The school received an ungraded inspection under section 8 of the Act on 8 and 9 May 2024. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are at the heart of the school in many important ways, even though their daily experiences are not consistent. Many enjoy warm, caring relationships with staff and with each other. Smiles remain a common feature of daily life, especially in the playground and during shared activities such as the school council. Pupils from different age groups often get along well. These positive relationships extend beyond school, such as through the exchange programme with a school in Belgium.

There is not, however, a shared view across the school of what high expectations should look like in different subjects and phases. Because of this, pupils' experiences in lessons and around school vary. Although they make progress, including many going on to attend college, more needs to be done to ensure that all pupils benefit from a consistently ambitious and well-delivered curriculum.

Behaviour in school is usually calm. Most pupils respond well to the routines and expectations set by staff. Positive behaviour and effort are regularly celebrated, for example through the popular 'shout-outs' in assemblies that recognise pupils' achievements. Attendance is also encouraged and rewarded, with the termly treasure hunt proving a fun and motivating way to promote good habits.

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

Trust and school leaders are working together to tackle the considerable challenges and changes the school has recently faced. They have introduced more effective policies, procedures and systems. These are improving pupils' attendance, behaviour and sense of safety. The trust and school share a clear commitment to improve pupils' experiences. Staff form positive relationships with pupils. This helps pupils to stay focused and engaged. More pupils now attend school regularly. However, oversight of the quality of education has not been robust enough.

The curriculum has some strengths. In certain areas, such as hydrotherapy and swimming, the school uses sensory and practical methods effectively. Pupils progress well in these sessions, which have clear steps to support learning. However, the curriculum is not clear in other areas, including the early years and in the sixth form. This results in pupils completing tasks that are too easy or lack purpose. They offer limited opportunity to build on what they already know and can do.

Following the last inspection, the school invested in high-quality equipment for the early years. However, these resources are not used to their full potential. The school has not provided staff with enough guidance on how best to use this equipment to support children's learning. Consequently, the resources do not consistently promote the development of key language, movement or play skills.

Effective checks are carried out in sessions that aim to improve attention, engagement and interaction. Staff use their voice and resources effectively to help pupils to refocus. This helps pupils build self-control and stay engaged. However, the school does not

always make clear what specific knowledge pupils should have at given points. This leads to checks that are too broad. As a result, gaps in understanding are sometimes missed. This slows the progress that pupils make.

Pupils take part in regular reading sessions. They usually enjoy listening to stories, particularly when the school uses props, lights and sounds to enhance storytelling. The school follows a structured phonics programme. However, the teaching of reading is not consistently effective. Some activities do little to help pupils practise and consolidate the sounds they have learned. The school does not evaluate the teaching of reading well enough to identify weaknesses or to provide the support needed to improve practice. For example, pupils are not always given books that match the sounds they know. Some stay on the same book for too long. They end up memorising the story instead of practising reading skills, which hinders their achievement.

The school strongly advocates for its pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, the school ensures that pupils receive the right medical support. It works effectively with health professionals to help pupils feel comfortable and well enough to attend school. Some external support, including from occupational therapists and mental health professionals, is working well. While there are shortcomings in the curriculum, teaching and assessment, this support helps the school maintain effective practice in meeting pupils' additional needs.

Pupils enjoy activities that broaden their experiences. These include careers events and volunteering in shops and schools. These opportunities help pupils build confidence and prepare for the future. However, the personal development programme is weakened by inconsistent communication support. The school is not consistent in how it guides pupils to use speech or signing to express themselves independently.

Governance is improving. Trustees are shifting from operational oversight towards a more strategic role. Recent appointments in safeguarding, education and finance indicate a focus on long-term improvement. Trustees are becoming more confident in setting priorities and establishing systems that support school improvement. Some school improvement actions are still recent, but there is clear momentum and a stronger foundation for further progress.

The school shows care for pupils, families and staff. Leaders are approachable. Most staff feel well supported and positive about their workload. Parents and carers largely value the care their children receive. Despite occasional communication issues, such as how the school reports on pupils' progress, the generally positive relationships put the school in a positive position to manage further improvements.

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 curriculum does not define and sequence the knowledge, vocabulary, concepts and skills that pupils should learn. In the early years, staff lack sufficient guidance on how to use recently purchased high-quality equipment effectively. As a result, pupils may repeat content unnecessarily or encounter concepts in an order that does not support secure understanding. It also makes it more difficult for teachers to assess pupils' learning accurately and to address any gaps. The school should refine the curriculum and improve staff guidance, so that learning is ambitious, well sequenced and effectively supported for all pupils.
- The current approach to phonics lacks structure and consistency. Some activities and resources are not matched to pupils' assessed stages of development. This weakens pupils' ability to develop secure decoding skills and slows their early reading progress. The school should ensure that its phonics programme, associated resources and assessment systems work together to provide a coherent, consistent and ambitious offer for pupils.
- The school's agreed approaches to communication are not used with consistency or precision. This hinders pupils' ability to understand and express themselves, which not only limits their access to learning but also affects their confidence and independence. The school should ensure that all staff are trained, supported and held to account for implementing communication strategies consistently, as an essential part of promoting pupils' personal development.
- Curriculum leadership lacks the clarity and subject knowledge needed to support consistent and ambitious teaching. Staff do not always receive the guidance or professional development they need to deliver subject content effectively or adapt it for pupils' diverse needs. The school should ensure that those overseeing the curriculum are well equipped to develop curriculum thinking, offer practical support and guide improvements in teaching across the school.

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	142557
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10378543
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	207
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Julie Perry
CEO of the trust	Jane Nolan (Interim CEO)
Headteacher	Rebecca Greig
Website	www.springcommon.cambs.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 and 9 May 2024, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Many have autism or severe learning difficulties, while a smaller number have profound and multiple learning disabilities.
- Since the last inspection, there has been a change in leadership within the trust. The chair of the trust and the interim CEO have been in post for less than a year. During their tenure, the central trust team has been expanded to include directors responsible for education, finance and safeguarding.
- The school's leadership team, including the headteacher, has been in post for the past 18 months or less.
- The school currently engages the services of two unregistered alternative providers.

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.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with a range of leaders, including the chair of the trust, the interim CEO, the director of education, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers and four members of the academy advisory group.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, communication, mathematics, life skills, physical education, and physical development. For each deep dive, they met with leaders to discuss the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and held discussions with pupils about their learning and broader school experience. Staff were present during pupil discussions to help pupils feel at ease and to support their ability to communicate about their education and school life. Inspectors also reviewed samples of pupils' work and listened to a selection of pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; 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 reviewed school documentation, including the school's development plan, minutes of meetings of the trust board and minutes of meetings of the academy advisory group.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's staff and parent surveys, including free-text comments submitted via Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Catherine Assink	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Dawes	Ofsted Inspector

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