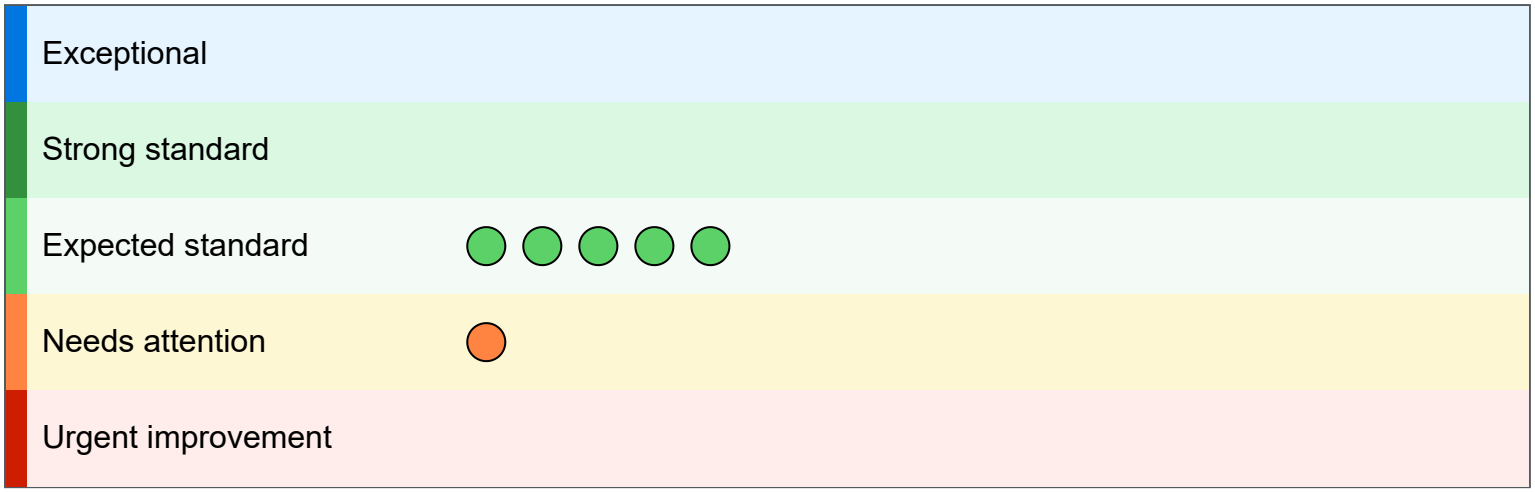
The Cornerstone Academy

Address: Blandford Close, Hamworthy, Poole, Dorset, BH15 4BQ

Unique reference number (URN): 139258

Inspection report: 16 September 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.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Historically, pupils have not achieved as highly in some subjects as they do in others. Leaders have acted swiftly to make improvements to the curriculum and teaching to address this. Pupils develop the knowledge and skills they need to complete their chosen qualifications successfully. Consequently, in most subjects, they are increasingly better prepared for their next stage of education.

Staff support and challenge pupils to produce high-quality work. Pupils with barriers to their learning, such as special educational needs and/or disabilities, make positive progress from their starting points. Pupils who are disadvantaged achieve in line with their peers nationally.

Leaders prioritise making sure that all pupils have secured the foundational skills of literacy so that they can be successful in their learning. For example, reading intervention helps to improve pupils' reading fluency and comprehension. This helps pupils to both catch up and keep up with their peers.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders, with the support of the trust, have planned the curriculum to be broad and well sequenced, so it builds on pupils' prior learning. Curriculum leaders have reviewed their subjects to ensure that they are ambitious for all pupils. They consider the local context and future destinations of pupils when selecting topics, for example, including texts in the reading programme to build pupils' wider world knowledge. As a result, pupils are now increasingly better prepared for their next stage in education.

Leaders have identified the teaching strategies that best support pupils to learn and remember the curriculum. Teachers typically use these effectively to explain concepts and check that pupils understand. This helps to identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge or understanding so that teachers can adjust activities to help pupils learn well.

Where pupils have a barrier to their learning, teachers generally provide appropriate adaptations and support so that these pupils learn as well as their peers. Staff support pupils who are not yet confident and accurate readers to develop these foundational skills. Leaders are now rightly focused on further developing staff's expertise so that there is a consistently positive experience for pupils across all areas of the curriculum.

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders have high aspirations for all pupils to achieve well. They remain focused on acting in the best interests of pupils. Leaders quickly identify the individual needs of pupils when they join the school. They use this information to plan appropriate strategies to support pupils' learning and/or wellbeing, for example providing access to mental health support or additional phonics teaching. Leaders monitor how well this additional support is helping pupils to progress. Leaders work effectively with other professionals, such as educational psychologists, to adjust support as required.

Leaders have trained staff to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers have the information they need about individual pupils to inform the planning of teaching activities. Typically, teachers use these strategies effectively, so these pupils make positive progress from their starting points.

Leaders use additional funding, such as the pupil premium, to support pupils to engage with education, for example, through funding additional tuition to ensure that pupils achieve the GCSE grades they need for further education or training. Where pupils are attending alternative provision, staff work with other professionals to choose an appropriate setting that meets pupils' individual needs and aspirations.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

Leaders and those responsible for governance have accurately evaluated the development priorities for the school. Where they identify an area for improvement, leaders make the changes needed. For example, the positive impact of leaders' work is evident in the changes to the curriculum and the rising numbers of pupils successfully completing national qualifications.

The trustees and local governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Together they ensure that they fulfil their statutory duties, such as maintaining a high standard of safeguarding. The trust both supports and challenges leaders to make improvements to the school. For example, they supported leaders to revise the behaviour policy to raise expectations for pupils' classroom conduct. Trustees recognise that there remain areas of the school's work that need the same sharp focus, such as attendance.

Staff appreciate the professional learning opportunities available to them. The ongoing training and coaching help teachers, including those early in their careers, to improve their classroom practice. Staff recognise the care that leaders show for staff's workload and wellbeing. They are proud to work at the school.

Leaders are keen to work in partnership with parents and the wider community, for example engaging with local employers to teach pupils about future careers and undertake work experience. Parents are typically positive about their child's experience at the school. They describe how pupils are happy and safe.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders' commitment to pupils' personal development is evident in the wealth of opportunities that pupils have to develop their characters and interests. Clubs and activities, such as bricklaying and the school productions, are enjoyed by many. The school houses of Brownsea, Giggers and Pergins enthusiastically compete over a range of whole school events. Pupils undertake leadership roles across the school. They confidently provide feedback to leaders about their experiences in the spirit of improvement, for example suggesting new clubs or trips that would interest them. Pupils are particularly proud of the CCARED awards they receive when they demonstrate the school values and manners. Leaders are particularly aware of pupils who may have barriers to taking part in activities. This is best illustrated by the extent to which leaders support young carers to take part in extra-curricular opportunities so that they thrive.

The school have designed a personal development programme that prepares pupils well for adult life. Pupils learn to keep themselves safe, for example, online. Pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships. Leaders are particularly alert to the local risks that face their pupils. For example, they explicitly teach pupils about the risks associated with open water swimming.

Pupils learn about the importance of respect for others. They make links between the British values and the school values. Pupils understand that discrimination is never acceptable. This tolerance for protected characteristics and respect for other races and religions prepares them well for adult life in modern Britain.

Leaders have revised the careers programme to make this a positive part of the school's work. Pupils engage with a wide range of employers, including through work experience and guest speakers. They learn about the benefits of further education and apprenticeships. This means that pupils are increasingly aware of the range of opportunities available to them after they leave the school.

Needs attention

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention

Attendance at this school is consistently lower than the national average. Too many pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, are persistently absent from school. Leaders and those responsible for governance are aware of this and have begun to make changes to address this concern. For example, employing additional staff to work with families to identify pupils' barriers to attendance. However, much of this work is recent and has, therefore, not had the time to have the desired impact. Consequently, too many pupils are unable to fully benefit from the education provided by the school due to their attendance.

Leaders have raised expectations for pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. Staff communicate these expectations clearly to pupils. Pupils appreciate it when staff fairly apply the behaviour systems as it means they can typically learn without disruption. The school never tolerates bullying and unkind behaviour. Most pupils show positive attitudes towards their learning. They are proud of the rewards they receive in recognition of this. However, there remains a minority of pupils who are not demonstrating the positive learning behaviours expected by staff. These pupils are receiving repeated sanctions, such as suspensions and lesson removals. These pupils need further help to adjust their behaviour and engage fully with their learning.

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

Pupils enjoy their learning and typically achieve well. The improvements made to curriculum and teaching mean that pupils are increasingly well prepared for their next steps in

education, employment and training. This is most notably evident in the rapid increase in proportion of pupils achieving the qualifications they need in English and mathematics. Staff quickly identify any barriers to learning and/or wellbeing and make sure that effective support is in place. This means that on the whole pupils successfully make progress from their starting points.

Pupils are proud of their school and describe how they feel part of the school community. There are warm, respectful relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils understand that the school does not tolerate unkind behaviour and bullying. They report any concerns to adults, knowing that they will be supported. This makes them feel safe. The school has made a commitment to pupils and their families to provide a 'Big school offer; small school ethos'. This is shown in the wide range of extra-curricular and leadership opportunities provided for pupils.

Pupils are positive about the raised expectations for pupil conduct, both in lessons and around the school. Most pupils show self-discipline and learning takes place uninterrupted. However, for a small minority of pupils their behaviour is not yet meeting leaders' expectations. This is leading to repeated sanctions and suspensions. These pupils need further support to re-engage positively with their learning.

The school communicates the importance of high attendance. Nevertheless, too many pupils are persistently absent from school. This means that these pupils are missing lessons and the extensive wider opportunities offered by the school. Leaders have introduced new strategies to raise attendance. However, as much of this work is recent, it is too early to see the impact of these changes.

Next steps

- Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that their chosen strategies are rapidly raising the attendance of all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged and/or have barriers to their learning.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers are equipped to quickly and skilfully reduce barriers to pupils' learning so that all pupils achieve highly across all areas of the curriculum.

About this inspection

This school is part of United 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), Sir John Coles, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Dame Reena Keeble.

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 and trust leaders. Inspectors also spoke with teaching staff, support staff and representatives of those responsible for governance.

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.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of 16 alternative provisions, including 13 that are unregistered.

Principal : Chris Phillips

Lead inspector:
Sara Berry, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Matthew Collins, Ofsted Inspector
Paul Williams, His Majesty's Inspector
Anna Mills, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from different sources. More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 16 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

645
Well below 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: 1,063

School capacity

900
Below 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: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

42.33%
Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 30.4%

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

4.50%
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: 3.53%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

20.78%
Well above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 14.0%

Location deprivation

Close to 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 (final)	37.3%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	31.0%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	42.6%	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 (final)	41.0	46.1	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	40.7	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	42.1	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)	-0.03	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.19	-0.03	Close to average
2021/22 (final)	0.78	-0.03	Above

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 (final)	23.7%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	17.4%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	26.9%	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 (final)	35.1	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	31.7	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	37.9	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)	-0.54	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.09	-0.57	Above
2021/22 (final)	0.62	-0.55	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 (final)	23.7%	53.1%	-29.5 pp
2023/24 (final)	17.4%	53.1%	-35.7 pp
2022/23 (final)	26.9%	52.4%	-25.5 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 (final)	35.1	50.4	-15.3
2023/24 (final)	31.7	50.0	-18.4
2022/23 (final)	37.9	50.3	-12.4

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)	-0.54	0.16	-0.71
2022/23 (final)	0.09	0.17	-0.08
2021/22 (final)	0.62	0.15	0.46

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 (revised)	81%	92%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	86%	93%	Not available

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2021 leavers (revised)	89%	94%	Not available

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 (3 term)	12.2%	8.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	13.7%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	14.5%	9.0%	Above

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 (3 term)	34.7%	23.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	39.2%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	44.5%	26.5%	Above

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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