

Cowley Hill School

Address: Winstre Road, Borehamwood, Borehamwood, Hertfordshire, WD6 5DP

Unique reference number (URN): 117099

Inspection report: 13 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

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 

Pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other disadvantaged pupils, generally achieve well, including in national tests. In 2025, outcomes in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 were above the national average. A high proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Although pupils' attainment in writing is secure, leaders have identified that there is some further work to do to ensure pupils make greater and more consistent progress in this area of the curriculum.

Targeted teaching, and a well-structured curriculum in Year 1, ensures that pupils who did not achieve as well as they should in the early years, catch up quickly. Pupils in key stage 1 demonstrate confidence and accuracy in their work. The proportion of pupils who meet the expected standard in the phonics screening check is broadly in line with the national average.

Generally, most pupils make steady progress through the curriculum and are well prepared for the next phase in their education.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders take effective action to improve pupils' attendance. For example, they build positive relationships with parents and work with them to find solutions when a pupil's attendance dips. Over time, all pupils' attendance is improving, and the number of pupils who are persistently absent is falling. The proactive approach the school takes to regular attendance is helping more pupils to benefit fully from the curriculum.

Generally, pupils behave well. The school environment is calm and orderly. This helps pupils learn because they can focus on their work without distraction. Most show positive attitudes to their learning. Staff typically apply the school rules and routines consistently and they remind pupils of these when needed.

Pupils learn what behaviour is not acceptable, such as using inappropriate language. They also learn the importance of being kind to others. Pupils say that any serious negative behaviour is rare, as is bullying. They explain that they all care for each other. This creates a respectful and positive atmosphere. Pupils enjoy playtimes. They show cooperation when using equipment and taking part in a wide range of games.

Pupils and adults build close and trusting relationships. When a pupil finds it difficult to manage their behaviour, staff encourage and guide them in a calm and effective way. This support helps pupils improve their behaviour over time.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the curriculum and the consistency of teaching across the school. They adapt and refine both to secure further improvements. For example,

the renewed approach to teaching writing is benefiting pupils.

Leaders plan the curriculum carefully. They ensure that it is appropriate for each year group and key stage. It sets out the important knowledge and skills that teachers should focus upon. Teachers typically deliver the curriculum well. Teachers pay close attention to ensure that pupils build up the important knowledge they need in reading, writing and mathematics. They develop pupils' vocabulary well. Leaders have ensured that staff have the subject knowledge they need to do this.

Generally, teachers design learning activities that help pupils build up the knowledge that is set out in the curriculum. In the main, teachers put in place measures that ensure pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities can access the same learning as their peers. That said, there are a small number of occasions when activities limit how well some pupils develop their independence.

Consistency for checking what pupils know in some subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics sometimes varies. There are times when some staff do not adjust teaching to match pupils' current level of understanding. This means that a few pupils do not build knowledge as securely as they could.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children in the early years know and follow the school's rules and routines, such as waiting patiently for their turn on bikes and scooters. They can navigate the classrooms with growing independence. For example, they select their own resources to complete tasks. The environment is thoughtfully designed to support this. Many parents and carers feel well informed about their child's progress.

Leaders have carefully considered the curriculum in the early years. It has a strong focus on developing children's ability to communicate. Staff create a language-rich environment. They use frequent conversations to help children learn new vocabulary. For example, when they play with the farm set staff introduce words, such as 'stable', and encourage children to use the new vocabulary. This helps children develop their language and communication skills. As a result, they learn to express their ideas and thoughts clearly. Many children also communicate happily with each other. They talk about what they are doing and share resources.

Learning to read is a school priority. Children learn to recognise the sounds that letters make and blend these sounds to read simple words. Many develop this knowledge well. This builds their self-confidence as emerging readers. Workbooks show that children develop their handwriting skills. They begin to learn important knowledge about numbers. The learning environment provides regular opportunities for children to practise these skills. Many children leave the early years ready for the demands of Year 1.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Systems for identifying pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are robust. Staff work effectively with parents and carers to help identify any additional needs pupils may have. Staff check pupils' progress and take timely action. For example, staff give pupils

who need help with reading one-to-one sessions for as long as they need this. They also create individual plans, with appropriate targets for pupils who have multiple additional needs. Well-trained staff deliver the support pupils require. This and other extra targeted teaching is checked to ensure it improves pupils' knowledge. Close links with external agencies provide ongoing guidance that strengthens this.

Staff identify pupils who may have a particular vulnerability. They use a range of strategies to help pupils feel safe and be ready to learn. For example, some pupils check in with a member of staff, which helps them talk about any worries they may have. Leaders have put in place approaches that ease the transition from home to learning time. This helps pupils to start the day ready to learn.

The pupil premium strategy prioritises high-quality teaching as the first step to help disadvantaged pupils progress from their starting points. Staff demonstrate this in classrooms. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils have access to the full curriculum and wider experiences.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders, including governors, have a shared vision for the school. They have clear systems in place to check the quality of the school's work. Due to this, they know the school's strengths and where there is further work to do. Typically, when improvements are identified, leaders take appropriate and timely action.

Governors carry out their duties effectively. They understand their statutory roles. For example, they seek appropriate assurances about the school's safeguarding culture. They know the school and its community well. The governors understand the school's priorities for further improvement. They closely monitor the school's progress and provide leaders with suitable levels of challenge and support. They use what they know about the school to make effective decisions that support pupils' learning and wellbeing. Pupils' best interests are at the heart of leaders' decision-making.

Staff, including those who are new to the teaching profession, feel well supported by leaders. They appreciate that leaders prioritise their wellbeing and workload. For example, staff talk positively about changes that have reduced unnecessary work. Staff professional learning is well planned and closely matched to the school's priorities. Leaders provide meaningful training that helps staff strengthen their teaching and feel confident in their roles. Staff speak positively about working at the school and feel valued as professionals.

Leaders have developed relationships with parents and carers that are typically positive. Parents generally report feeling welcome at the school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils learn an appropriate relationships and sex education and health education programme. Among other important knowledge, they learn how to build and maintain healthy relationships. Pupils talk about this confidently. These skills help them make friends, play well with others and develop positive social skills. Well attended sessions for pupils, parents and carers help them develop their understanding of online safety.

The school's personal development programme, along with its assemblies, strengthen pupils' understanding of respecting others. For example, they learn that people differ from one another. Also, that they should be kind and try to understand these differences. Pupils show this understanding in the way they speak and play with one another.

Pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of their feelings and personal wellbeing. This provides some initial understanding of how they can keep themselves mentally healthy. Many pupils show a strong understanding of right and wrong. They have well developed characters. Pupils also learn about fundamental British values and demonstrate respect for rules. Older pupils speak confidently when expressing their views. They act as positive role models for younger pupils, helping to create a considerate school community.

The school marks a variety of cultural events, several of which reflects pupils' own religions and cultural backgrounds. These nurture pupils' interest of and understanding of cultural diversity. Trips are chosen to broaden pupils' cultural opportunities. The school offers a wide range of interesting clubs. Many of these develop pupils' talents, such as being creative and artistic. Staff plan the programme of clubs carefully, matching them to pupils' needs and interests. Leaders ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils benefit from these clubs. Pupils speak positively about the opportunities available and enjoy taking on new challenges.

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

Pupils describe their school as inclusive, where everyone feels they belong. Pupils show this is the case through their actions. For example, they greet visitors warmly with smiles and friendly conversation. Additionally, pupils have positive relationships with each other and with adults. This helps them to feel safe and reinforces the school's ethos.

Generally, pupils understand and follow the school rules. This means that the school is a positive learning environment. There are few incidents of bullying. If it does occur, pupils know adults will stop it. Staff use a range of approaches to help pupils feel happy and settled, which encourages regular attendance. For example, pupils can choose to spend time indoors playing games at playtime.

Pupils enjoy learning because teachers make lessons interesting. Teachers explain concepts clearly in ways pupils understand. This helps them remember new knowledge. They also teach pupils to use appropriate vocabulary for each topic. This means most can speak confidently about what they know. These approaches help pupils learn well from their individual starting points. As a result, pupils generally achieve well.

Many pupils take on extra responsibilities. For example, eco-warriors, who care for the school grounds. Others help raise money for charity. Pupils talk proudly about how much they have raised and why this support matters to those it benefits. These responsibilities help them to feel part of the wider community. To gain these roles, all pupils write a personal manifesto and vote in secret. This helps pupils have experience of democracy, which teaches them about key fundamental British values. A range of clubs, such as origami and dance, allows pupils to develop new interests.

Pupils at each stage are generally well prepared for the next step in their education. For example, Year 6 pupils learn how to manage themselves in different, sometimes challenging, scenarios. Combined with secure curriculum knowledge, this prepares them well for the move to secondary school.

Next steps

- Leaders should build on the strengths in teaching by ensuring that staff consistently check pupils' understanding and adapt teaching so that activities are highly effective in helping pupils learn the curriculum securely and are precisely matched to their needs.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Jacqueline Spriggs.

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.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school has undergone changes in leadership roles since the last inspection.

The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Headteacher : Miss Louise Thomas

Lead inspector:

Jessie Linsley, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Debbie Rogan, Ofsted Inspector

Karen Stanton, Ofsted Inspector

Richard Fordham, 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 13 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

424

Above 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: 272

School capacity

465

Above 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: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

27.82%

Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 26.3%

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

1.18%

Below 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: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

20.99%

Above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Above 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

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	69%	61%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	75%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	65%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	65%	60%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	81%	74%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	81%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	76%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	85%	73%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	73%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	77%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	69%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	72%	71%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	78%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	84%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	69%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	82%	73%	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 reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	54%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	65%	47%	Above
2023/24 (final)	55%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	41%	44%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	70%	62%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	71%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	77%	62%	Above
2022/23 (final)	59%	60%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	63%	59%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	65%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	64%	58%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	59%	58%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	63%	60%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	71%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	59%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	59%	59%	Close to average

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 reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	54%	68%	-14 pp
2024/25 (revised)	65%	69%	-5 pp
2023/24 (final)	55%	67%	-13 pp
2022/23 (final)	41%	66%	-25 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	70%	80%	-10 pp
2024/25 (revised)	71%	81%	-10 pp
2023/24 (final)	77%	80%	-2 pp
2022/23 (final)	59%	78%	-19 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	63%	78%	-15 pp
2024/25 (revised)	65%	78%	-14 pp
2023/24 (final)	64%	78%	-14 pp
2022/23 (final)	59%	77%	-19 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	63%	80%	-17 pp
2024/25 (revised)	71%	81%	-10 pp
2023/24 (final)	59%	79%	-20 pp
2022/23 (final)	59%	79%	-20 pp

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)	5.8%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	6.1%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	7.1%	5.9%	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 (2 term)	15.6%	13.3%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	18.3%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	23.7%	16.2%	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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