

Running Deer School

Butterdon Wood, Willingstone, Moretonhampstead, Devon TQ13 8PY

Inspection date

8 May 2024

Overall outcome

The school meets all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(2), 2(2)(a), 2(2)(b) and 2(2)(h)

- At the last inspection, the quality of education at Running Deer School was found to not be ambitious enough for its pupils. Although pupils were supported to reintegrate into education successfully, the academic curriculum did not give pupils sufficient opportunities to learn. The school has responded positively to the findings of the previous inspection. They have updated their curriculum policy, which is now more ambitious. In particular, it details the expectation that pupils will be taught core skills through individual English, mathematics and science lessons. The policy is published on the school's website.
- The school has adapted the curriculum design. This aims to ensure pupils experience a broad and balanced education. Pupils are given opportunities to learn linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education. Pupils benefit from individual programmes of study linked to their needs and aspirations. Curriculum planning is adapted to pupils' individual needs and starting points. Since the last inspection, the school has particularly focused on prioritising the place of English and literacy as central to the curriculum offer. As a result, pupils increasingly acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills. They can make progress across a broad and balanced range of subjects. The proprietor has ensured that this standard is now met.

Paragraphs 3, 3(a), 3(b), 3(c), 3(d), 3(e), 3(f) and 3(g)

- Since the last inspection a specialist English teacher has been appointed. She has relevant experience of working with pupils who have social, emotional or mental health (SEMH) needs and understands her subject in detail. English learning is now sequenced with greater clarity and ambition. Curriculum planning is based on the starting points of pupils and their interests. This has helped to ensure that English lessons are more purposeful. Pupils are now producing written work and reading for a range of purposes. However, the school has not ensured that curriculum design is as explicit about the knowledge it wants pupils to retain across each key stage in English, as it has in science

and mathematics. Nevertheless, pupils are increasingly well prepared for their next stage in their education. This is reflected in all former pupils going onto to sustained education, employment or training.

- Expectations have risen. The school has ensured staff are clearer about what they should expect from pupils. Relationships are at the heart of the work staff do with often complex pupils. Staff role model positive attitudes to learning and appropriate ways to interact with others effectively. Staff are also increasingly helping pupils to develop more positive attitudes to the subjects which they have formerly found most challenging. A good example of this is the impact of the English teacher who has ensured that pupils' perspectives of English have changed. By expecting more of pupils, and them writing more, the school is increasingly recognising that pupils can do more than they realised in the past. As a result, the standards in Part 1 that were not met at the time of the last inspection are now met consistently.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 6

- Running Deer School runs a unique provision for pupils with SEMH needs. The school is very child centred. Staff know the individual needs and circumstances of each pupil exceptionally well. They intend to transform pupils' experiences of education and to reintegrate them into learning and society. As such, staff work together carefully to ensure that pupils' welfare, health and safety is a top priority. Staff care for and respond to pupils' needs on an ongoing basis. As a result, the proprietor has ensured that this standard is met.

Paragraph 7, 7(a) and 7(b)

- Safeguarding arrangements are sound. A comprehensive policy for managing safeguarding underpins the work of leaders. The policy is up-to-date and refers to the latest statutory guidance. Leaders publish the policy on the school's website, along with several other relevant procedures. There are clear lines of accountability within the safeguarding policy, which staff understand and follow diligently. Regular and useful safeguarding training supports the implementation of the policy. Pupils feel safe.
- The proprietor has taken extra action to ensure the implementation of safeguarding policy and practice are checked with greater rigour. The development of the governing body now means there is greater oversight of leaders' work and its impact. As a result, the school is better placed to refine and improve its processes for protecting pupils. Therefore, this standard remains met.

Paragraph 11

- The proprietor has ensured the school has an appropriate, up-to-date health and safety policy. The policy outlines clearly who has responsibility for overseeing, checking and improving health and safety practice at all levels. Policies are considerate of the specific nature of provision and the unique school site. For example, there is a particular focus on the outdoor learning opportunities the school offers and the impact of severe weather. Consideration is also given to the management of the site. For example, there are compost toilets that are regularly maintained by an external contractor to ensure the site remains safe. This standard remains met.

Paragraph 15

- At the time of the last inspection, it was found that processes of recording and following up on attendance were insufficient. Since that time, the proprietor has ensured that processes for recording attendance have been considerably tightened. There is now a central electronic system which is used to record absence accurately and in a timely manner. Non-attendance is followed up quickly. The school ensures contact is made with home to check any reason for non-attendance. The school keeps diligent records relating to non-attendance. They utilise this to track trends and ensure that strategies to promote attendance match the unique and individual needs of each pupil. Most pupils' attendance improves over time. Many attend exceptionally well. The proprietor has ensured this standard is now met.

Paragraph 16, 16(a) and 16(b)

- The proprietor has adopted and implemented an effective risk-assessment policy. The school understands the importance of 'risk versus benefit' assessment. Staff benefit from useful training to understand the relevance of assessing and reducing risk. Staff implement the policy appropriately. Risk assessments are in place for the premises, for educational activities and for specific work in the school, such as the fire pit and opportunities to learn in the woods.
- Teachers complete appropriate risk-assessments when organising educational trips and visits. For example, some pupils were preparing to take part in the Ten Tors at the time of this inspection. Staff had identified appropriately the potential risks of the trip and how to mitigate against them. Appropriate consideration is given to ensure that food and water for consumption are managed carefully when pupils are on the school site. Therefore, the proprietor has ensured this standard remains met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34

- At the time of the previous inspection, leaders had not ensured that all of the independent school standards were met. Consequently, paragraph 34 of the independent school standards was not met. Since the last inspection, the proprietor and school have strengthened the governing body. New governors bring with them useful and appropriate experience of education and organisational development. As such, they are increasingly well placed to challenge leaders and check what they are told in meetings through regular visits. This has already improved the effectiveness of the school. The proprietor has taken effective action to rectify these shortfalls and so this standard has also been met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

The school now meets the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of Education Provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work–
 - 2(1)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(a) full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (construed in accordance with section 8 of the Education Act 1996), which gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education;
 - 2(2)(b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills; and (h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range; and
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

Part 3: Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 15. The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration)

(England) Regulations 2006[13].

Part 8: Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34. (1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - (a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - (b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

School details

Unique reference number	143539
DfE registration number	878/6067
Inspection number	10336617

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

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	8 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	13
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Running Deer C.I.C
Chair	Joanna Winterburn
Headteacher	Mr Nicholas Hurst
Annual fees (day pupils)	£72,098.54
Telephone number	01647279328
Website	www.runningdeerschool.org.uk
Email address	school@runningdeer.org.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	31 October–3 November 2023

Information about this school

- Running Deer School is an independent school specialising in providing education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. The school is situated in a large area of woodland in Dartmoor National Park. There are five pods, four of which are classrooms and one which is the school office base.
- The school is run by Running Deer Community Interest Company. This is a non-profit making organisation.

- The previous standard inspection took place in October 2023, and the school was judged to be inadequate.
- The school has more pupils on roll than the recorded maximum capacity of 10 as recorded on Get Information About Schools. This means the school does not comply with its registered agreement at this time.
- The school is included on the list of approved independent special schools in accordance with section 41 of the Children and Families Act 2014.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- The inspection was conducted with no notice.
- A notice was served on this school by the Department for Education (DfE), following the last inspection which took place in October 2023. The school was judged inadequate overall, with the quality of education and leadership and management being inadequate. The school submitted an action plan to the DfE and this was judged to be unsatisfactory.
- Inspectors were asked to review the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan and to check whether parts 1, 3, 5 and 8 of the independent school standards are now met.

Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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