

Inspection of Running Deer School

Butterdon Wood, Willingstone, Moretonhampstead TQ13 8PY

Inspection dates: 31 October to 3 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Running Deer School experience a unique and individual approach to their education. The focus is on repairing pupils' negative perceptions of education and developing self-belief and aspiration. However, not enough priority is given to pupils' academic learning, once safe and trusted relationships with staff have been established. Staff spend too much time negotiating with pupils over their learning. This limits pupils' ability to build new knowledge and progress in their core skills, such as literacy and reading.

Staff and pupils behave respectfully towards each other, most of the time. Despite working one to one, pupils have appropriate opportunities to work and interact with others. Pupils feel safe and enjoy attending. They value the understanding staff have of the challenges that they have faced and still need to overcome. Staff want the best for pupils so that they are prepared for their next steps. However, too many staff do not have the resources, expertise or necessary training to meet pupils' academic needs.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the nurture and individualised support their children receive. They describe the positive impact the school has had on their child's well-being, self-worth and understanding of themselves.

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

The school has prioritised pupils' re-engagement with education. However, once this is established, the school does not build on this with enough rigour around academic success. Expectations of pupils, and how staff should role model and promote these expectations, have not been shared widely or communicated clearly enough. Consequently, expectations of pupils and what they can achieve are too low.

Staff build on the positive relationships they have with pupils to deliver a bespoke provision for each individual. The school aims to meet pupils' needs on a day-to-day basis, through a flexible and dynamic approach to the daily timetable and routines. As a result, the school meets pupils' social and emotional needs. Staff are skilled in this. However, once pupils are at the point that they are ready to learn, the ambition for what they can achieve academically is not high enough. For example, the school has not placed enough priority on pupils' learning in English. There has been limited work to design a sequence of learning so that pupils develop their literacy skills and reading ability. Pupils do not learn what they need to access the rest of the curriculum. There is a lack of regular learning in English. Staff do not have the knowledge that they need to teach effectively so that the school's ethos and vision is realised.

In some subjects, the school has designed an appropriately sequenced curriculum. Learning is adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils. However, a significant amount of learning time is dictated by the pupil. The school has not established

sufficient clarity in the expectations of how pupils should be spending their time. Too much is left to pupils' autonomy.

Governors are gaining an understanding of the work of the school, but support and challenge are limited. The proprietor does not do enough to hold the school to account for how well the provision meets pupils' needs. As a result, there is a lack of accountability, scrutiny and rigour to quality assure the provision. This includes the monitoring of the independent school standards (the standards). The school maintains records around attendance. There is support put in place to address concerns about poor attendance at an individual level. However, the information gathered on attendance is not always fully accurate and understood. The support put in place is not always reviewed in a timely manner. The proprietor does not know enough about the provision, including the school's curriculum, and how well pupils access this. Consequently, the school does not meet the requirements set out in some parts of the standards. These standards cover the curriculum, the welfare, health and safety of pupils and the quality of leadership and management of the school.

The range of varied experiences pupils gain at Running Deer School contributes well to their wider development. One-to-one working, across a team of adults, gives staff plentiful opportunities to capitalise on and extend pupils' talents and interests. Staff use this to engage pupils in practical tasks and project-based learning. These activities promote pupils' resilience, curiosity and awareness of the world around them, for example by developing tolerance and understanding of differences and disabilities. The school has developed a curriculum to support the teaching of personal, social and health education (PSHE). The curriculum includes the required elements of relationships and sex education. Pupils receive independent careers advice and guidance, which the school uses to design an individualised offer for each pupil at key stage 4. This helps towards pupils' transitions from school to their next steps into education, employment or training.

Staff, including those who are new to the school and those in the early stages of their career, receive appropriate support so that they can meet the social and emotional needs of the pupils within the school's unique setting. Relationships in the school are positive. Staff say they feel part of a team. They are supportive of each other. This enables them to dedicate their attention to pupils' individual needs and respond in the most appropriate manner on a day-to-day basis. The school ensures that it complies with schedule 10 of the Equalities Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The proprietor does not demonstrate the required knowledge appropriate to their role. This means that the independent school standards are not all met. The proprietor should ensure that they know and understand all the standards and take action to ensure they are met consistently.
- The proprietor has not ensured that the quality of education for pupils is ambitious enough. Consequently, pupils do not learn core skills well enough and are not prepared sufficiently for the next stage in their education, employment or training. The proprietor must ensure that there is a highly ambitious curriculum in place for pupils, so that pupils can achieve the best possible outcomes.
- There is not a coherent and sequenced curriculum in place for English. As a result, pupils do not develop their literacy and reading skills sufficiently. Pupils receive a disconnected series of lessons and they do not build their knowledge incrementally. The proprietor should ensure that the curriculum for English is clear, well-sequenced and identifies the important knowledge pupils need to gain. This will help pupils to have the skills they need to prepare them for, and support them in, life beyond school.
- Expectations of pupils are not high enough. Expectations are not shared effectively so that they are commonly understood. Consequently, some staff do not have the knowledge they need to role model effectively and promote expectations well enough. Pupils have too much autonomy over what happens in their timetable and opt out of activities they do not like. The proprietor must ensure that expectations of staff and pupils are clearly communicated, commonly understood and adhered to.
- There is a lack of accountability, scrutiny and rigour in the school's systems and processes. As a result, there are gaps in, and limited oversight of, how effective the school's provision is to provide a high-quality education to all pupils. The proprietor must ensure that they have the necessary systems and processes in place to gain an accurate and assured overview that pupils are receiving a high-quality education that meets their needs.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	143539
DfE registration number	878/6067
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10286448
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	14
Proprietor	Running Deer C.I.C
Chair	Joanna Winterburn
Headteacher	Nicholas Hurst
Annual fees (day pupils)	£72,098.54
Telephone number	01647 400201
Website	www.runningdeerschool.org.uk
Email address	info@runningdeer.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 to 4 July 2019

Information about this school

- Running Deer School is situated in a large area of woodland approximately two miles north of Moretonhampstead. 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.
- Since the material change inspection in December 2019, which was requested to increase the number of pupils on roll from four to ten, there has been a change to the head of school and significant changes in staffing and roles of responsibility.
- The school accommodates pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- The school has exceeded the maximum number of pupils on roll that it is registered to admit.

Information about this inspection

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

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point in time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The 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 head of school, the managing director and director of operations. In addition, an inspector met with a member of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English including early reading, science and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with lead teachers, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work. In addition, inspectors looked at curriculum documents and spoke to teachers about some other subjects. Inspectors sampled individual pupils to gather evidence about the quality of education.

- An adult was present when inspectors spoke with pupils. Adults supported pupils to engage with inspectors and provide their views on what it is like to be a pupil at the school.
- The inspection was not carried out over consecutive days due to adverse weather conditions, which resulted in the school site being closed to staff and pupils. Inspectors spent three days out of a four-day period on site.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site.
- Inspectors analysed school documentation, including leaders' evaluations and plans for improvement. Inspectors scrutinised a range of policies and procedures, including those that relate to the curriculum, SEND, safeguarding and admissions.
- Inspectors checked the safety and suitability of the premises. They considered risk assessments and the policies in place to promote the well-being of pupils.
- Inspectors gathered the views of parents through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments, as well speaking with parents face to face and on the telephone. Inspectors evaluated responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Leanne Thirlby, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Rachel Hesketh

His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet 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)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan; and
- 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;
 - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress; and
- 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;
 - 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-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and

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