

Belong School Gloucestershire

Church Lane, Whaddon, Gloucester, Gloucestershire GL4 0UF

Inspection date

29 September 2021

Overall outcome

The school is unlikely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material changes relating to the school provision are implemented

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(2), 2(2)(a)–(b), 3, 3(a), 3(e)

- The proprietor proposes to increase the maximum number of pupils from 32 to 50 and to extend the lower age limit to admit pupils from the age of 12. The school's existing registration allows it to admit pupils from the age of 13.
- Senior leaders are in the process of improving curriculum plans. Currently, these plans are not sufficiently detailed to show how pupils' knowledge will grow from the age of 12. In particular, there are no appropriate plans in place to support the systematic teaching of reading for pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read.
- In addition, staff have not had the specific training needed to equip them to teach phonics, which is likely to be needed for some pupils. This means that these pupils are not likely to acquire the reading and writing knowledge they need to achieve well.
- The standards in Part 1 are not likely to be met if the material change is implemented.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7–7(b)

- The school's safeguarding policy complies with the latest requirements set out by the Secretary of State. It is available on the school's website. It provides clear and comprehensive guidance to secure effective safeguarding practice throughout the school. The school's designated safeguarding lead is knowledgeable about aspects of safeguarding and ensures a timely and appropriate response to any concerns raised.

Paragraph 11

- There is a detailed health and safety policy that sets out roles and responsibilities for ensuring health and safety practice at the school. Senior leaders are vigilant and carry out frequent checks to ensure that the policy is implemented.

Paragraph 12

- On the new main school site, the proprietor has ensured compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Fire doors are well maintained, with appropriate signage. All the requirements in respect of fire safety were found to be met on the main school site. Frequent practice fire evacuations happen throughout the year and are recorded appropriately. This enables leaders to assess how well pupils can leave the site if they need to in an emergency.
- The school also uses a small site approximately nine miles from the new main school site. This is used to support individual pupils who need extra help to make the transition to the new main school. Leaders check that the requirements for fire safety are in order. However, where shortfalls have been found on the site, leaders have not ensured that these have been acted on quickly. A lapse in fire extinguisher checks was picked up, but no action had been taken to remedy this.

Paragraph 14

- The proposed ratios of staff to pupils are suitable. Leaders plan to increase the number of staff to ensure that extra pupils will be well supervised.

Paragraph 16–16(b)

- There are detailed and relevant risk assessments in place. These set out clearly likely risks and the strategies to reduce them. These are well maintained and checked by leaders.
- Although the school's new main site is likely to meet requirements, shortfalls on the additional site mean that the standards in Part 3 are not likely to be met if the material change is implemented.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 18(1)–18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(1)–19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6)–20(6)(b)(iii), 21(1)–21(6)

- The proprietor ensures that recruitment procedures meet requirements when appointing new staff. Appropriate checks are made to ensure that adults applying to work at the school are suitable to work with children. Checks are recorded on the school's single central record. This includes appropriate extra checks on senior leaders and board members.
- The standards in Part 4 are likely to be met if the material change is implemented.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 24(1)–(2), 26, 27–27(b)

- The school has changed sites and now occupies a large school site in Whaddon, Gloucester. On both the new main school site and in the small additional site used by the school, classrooms and other spaces for pupils are well maintained. They have suitable internal and external lighting, acoustics and heating.
- On both sites, there is a suitable medical room available for the accommodation and treatment of pupils. There are washing and toilet facilities nearby.

Paragraphs 23(1)–23(1)(c), 28(1)–28(1)(d)

- On the new main site, toilet facilities are appropriate. There are separate toilet blocks for boys and girls, and these are for sole use by pupils. Water in the sinks is maintained at an appropriate temperature. However, on the additional site, there is only one toilet available to be used by both pupils and staff. This does not meet the paragraph that requires that suitable toilet facilities are provided for the sole use of pupils.

Paragraph 25

- The accommodation provided at the new main school site provides appropriate facilities. However, at the additional small site, the entrance to the site is not secure. The accommodation does not allow for the identity of visitors to be checked in a secure manner.

Paragraph 29(1)–29(1)(b)

- The new main school site has multiple areas outside for physical activities, as well as for pupils to relax and socialise. At the additional site, there is a small space outside for pupils to play.
- Due to the shortfalls in the additional site used by the school, the standards in Part 5 are not likely to be met if the material change is implemented.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–(c)

- The executive headteacher and head of school work with integrity. They are determinedly working to make improvements to the quality of education. Along with the proprietor, leaders are passionate about providing high-quality provision for pupils who struggle to maintain school places.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders promote pupils' well-being.
- The proprietor and senior leaders have not ensured that all the independent school standards are likely to be met should the material change be approved. The curriculum is not constructed in a way that is likely to secure strong outcomes for younger pupils. Premises and safety issues exist at the additional site used by the school.
- The standards in Part 8 are not likely to be met if the material change is implemented.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is unlikely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

School details

Unique reference number	146671
DfE registration number	916/6025
Inspection number	10205884

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Other independent school
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	Belong Learning CIC
Chair	James Evans
Headteacher	Mrs Janie Ashburner
Annual fees (day pupils)	£39,000 to £90,000
Telephone number	03003035755
Website	www.belonglearning.co.uk/gloucestershire
Email address	reception.gloucestershire@belonglearning.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	9 and 10 July 2019

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	13 to 16	12 to 16	13 to 16
Number of pupils on the school roll	32	50	32

Reason for inspector's recommendations

The school is unlikely to meet all of the independent school standards should the requested changes be approved. The curriculum is not likely to meet the needs of younger pupils, particularly those who need to catch up with reading. There are safety and premises issues that need to be resolved at the additional site being used by the school.

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	32	50
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	32	50
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	32	50
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	32	50

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	21	29
Number of part-time teaching staff	3	3
Number of staff in the welfare provision	0	0

Information about this school

- Belong School Gloucestershire is an independent special school. It operates from a main site on the outskirts of Gloucester. It also uses a small site, Hartpury Methodist Church in Hartpury, to support pupils who may need extra help to transition to the main school. The school no longer uses previously used sites in Churchdown or Lydney.
- The school was previously called Community Mentoring and Support School. It received a standard inspection in July 2019. This was the school's first inspection after

its initial registration in December 2018. At this time, the school was operating from the site in Lydney.

- The proprietor employs an executive headteacher to oversee the work of this school and another school, Belong Devon.
- The school is registered to provide education for boys and girls with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. They join the school throughout the year, often having been excluded or having attended a number of mainstream and specialist schools. Many have been out of full-time education for more than a year.
- The school uses two alternative education providers, both of which are unregistered.

Information about this inspection

- The Department of Education commissioned this inspection to establish whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if a material change to the school's registration is implemented. The proprietor proposes to extend the lower limit of the school's age range from 13 to 12 years old. The proprietor proposes to increase the maximum number of pupils from 32 to 50 and to continue to use a building that the school has already moved to in Whaddon, Gloucester.
- During the inspection, the inspector visited the additional site used by the school and met with the executive headteacher and the chief operating officer there. At the new main school site, the inspector had further meetings with the executive headteacher and head of school. The inspector also had discussions with the proprietor on the telephone. She held a telephone conversation with a representative of Gloucestershire County Council. The inspector toured the site, including the outside areas with school leaders.
- The inspector considered a range of documentation, including curriculum plans, policy documents, risk assessments and documents related to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Tonwen Empson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is unlikely 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)(b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills.
- 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(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 23(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2), the standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 23(1)(a) suitable toilet and washing facilities are provided for the sole use of pupils.
- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

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.

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