

# Coombe House School

Dorset Centre of Excellence, Donhead St Mary, Shaftesbury SP7 9LP

**Inspection date**

13 April 2022

**Overall outcome**

**The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens**

## Main inspection findings

### Part 1. Quality of education provided

#### *Paragraph 2, 4*

- Coombe House School is proposed to be a large special school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and/or autism spectrum disorder. The proprietor is rightly ambitious for the school and is seeking to build a centre of excellence that is worthy of sharing with others. Leaders have devised a curriculum that has the breadth to support pupils to achieve high-level qualifications wherever possible. Everyone wants the very best for pupils attending this school.
- The curriculum policy sets out to provide pupils with learning that matches their individual needs. Right from the start, leaders intend that teachers will check carefully what pupils know and need to learn next. From here, pupils will join a phase of the curriculum that provides suitable learning. At regular intervals, teachers will check pupils' progress and review plans for their learning to ensure it is precisely what they need. Throughout, leaders will support teachers to cater for pupils' individual needs as set out in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans.
- Each phase within the curriculum provides increasing academic challenge. For example, the initial acorn phase provides pupils with opportunities to build core skills through different themes. Further on, the seedling and sapling phases enable pupils to build knowledge in a broad and balanced range of subjects, including French. Schemes of work show what leaders intend pupils to learn in each phase. These take into account pupils' ages and aptitudes.
- Leaders consider pupils' personal development to be a fundamental part of the curriculum and aim for it to be a constant feature of daily life at the school. Plans for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education are well thought-out and reflect leaders' aim for pupils to become independent, resilient and well equipped for future life. Plans for PSHE teaching pay regard to the protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010. Policies and curriculum plans show that British values will be actively promoted.
- The curriculum provides rich opportunities for pupils to learn about careers. This work will start from the first phase of education and continue throughout the school.

Leaders have ensured that plans take account of pupils' individual skills and talents, build on their aspirations and provide impartial guidance. Over time, careers education will enable pupils to make well-informed choices.

- The relationships and sex education policy is published on the school's website. Leaders have clear intentions to provide pupils with this important learning in a manner that is age-appropriate and suits their individual needs. Leaders have set out in the policy what parents will need to do if they seek to excuse their child from sex education.
- Teachers will provide parents with a written report each year. They will also hold two discussions with parents to share how well pupils are achieving against the school's expectations and progressing towards their individual targets.

### *Paragraph 3*

- Leaders have already employed some teaching staff. These qualified teachers have received suitable training to help them to use effective teaching methods that take into account pupils' aptitudes, needs and prior attainments. Leaders have set out a suitable programme of learning for all new teaching staff that includes equipping them to motivate pupils and support them to manage their own behaviour.
- A wealth of appropriate resources is in place for teachers to use to support pupils' learning. These are of high quality and suitable for the range of ages and needs that the school will provide for.
- Leaders have high expectations for teaching. Plans are in place to check regularly that teachers have good subject knowledge, assess pupils' learning precisely and utilise effective methods so that pupils achieve well.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

## Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

### *Paragraph 5*

- There is provision in place to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Schemes of work show how teaching will support pupils to know how to distinguish between right and wrong, take responsibility for their behaviour and how they can play an active part in society. Leaders have made explicit plans for pupils to learn about other cultures and faiths.
- The curriculum promotes British values. This includes learning about respect for other people, including those with protected characteristics, and about democracy and the law in England.
- Leaders make clear when discussing the curriculum that they will ensure pupils are not exposed to partisan political views in teaching or any other activities.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met.

## Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

### *Paragraphs 7, 9–16*

- The safeguarding and child protection policy is published on the school's website. It adheres to the guidance in 'Keeping children safe in education, 2021' and makes appropriate reference to local safeguarding arrangements. The designated

safeguarding leaders have had suitable training and can explain the steps that they will take to keep pupils safe from harm. Staff who are already employed have received appropriate training in safeguarding and the risks of radicalisation. Leaders can explain the actions that they have already taken to build relationships with key partners to support pupils at risk and promote their welfare. Leaders have identified some likely risks that pupils may face and can explain how they will keep a close eye on their well-being.

- The behaviour policy sets out the school's approach to support pupils to manage their behaviour effectively. This includes rewards and sanctions. Leaders have made clear that exclusion will only be used as a last resort. Staff have received training so they can help to implement the policy and follow the school's preferred approach.
- Leaders have written an anti-bullying policy that relates well to the school's behaviour policy. It includes strategies that are likely to be effective in preventing bullying as much as possible.
- There are clear systems in place to promote health and safety at the school. The policy, published on the website, sets out how relevant laws will be complied with.
- The proprietor has ensured compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. For example, the premises have suitable signage, equipment and fittings to promote fire safety. Evacuation routes and procedures are in place.
- Leaders have established a suitable approach to providing first aid. All staff will receive first-aid training soon after they join the school. First-aid boxes and supplies are readily available for staff to use in the event of accident or illness.
- Staffing numbers have been planned to ensure that pupils are properly supervised. Leaders intend that staff will keep a close eye on pupils and be on hand to help them at all times.
- There are admissions and attendance registers in place already. These meet government regulations and will allow leaders to maintain effective oversight of pupil absence.
- Leaders have made important arrangements so that pupils and staff will be safeguarded from risks both on and off site. A risk assessment policy explains the approach. Records show that many of these checks to identify possible harm are already in place and that mitigating action has been taken.
- The standards in this paragraph are likely to be met.

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

##### *Paragraphs 18–21*

- The proprietor has ensured that checks take place to ensure that adults at the school are suitable to work with children. These include all staff employed at the school and the directors of the company.
- Leaders do not intend to employ supply staff. However, they know the checks that they need to make should they do so.
- There is a single central record of suitability checks. The safeguarding director checks this regularly to ensure that it is up to date and complete.

- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

## Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

### *Paragraphs 23–31*

- The proposed school is situated in part of the buildings and extensive grounds of a former independent school. In the 55-acre site, there are numerous facilities that pupils will have access to such as a swimming pool, sports hall and a walled garden. The school, which is set in an area demarcated with fencing, will include purpose-built classrooms for art, music and drama.
- Classrooms provide sufficient space, are well lit and have appropriate acoustics. They are organised into blocks that can house groups of pupils following a specific phase of the school's curriculum. The classrooms can currently accommodate up to 200 pupils.
- In each block, drinking water is available, away from the toilets and labelled clearly.
- In each building, there are sufficient single toilets for pupils' use only.
- Next to a large hall designated for indoor physical education, there are changing rooms that include showers for when pupils dress for physical education (PE).
- The school has a large, well-stocked library. In each building, there are sensory rooms and spaces that can be used for therapies or individual teaching. There is plenty of space additional to the designated classrooms that pupils can use.
- There is adequate water supply to all toilet and washing facilities. Hot water is at a safe temperature.
- There are two designated medical rooms. Both are close to the pupils' toilets and have sinks.
- The grounds within the boundary of the school have plenty of space for play. There are two hard-court areas and a field to the front of the school. There are many other outdoor areas, including woodland for pupils to learn and socialise in.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

## Part 6. Provision of information

### *Paragraph 32*

- The proposed school has an easily navigated website that includes all of the required information that is currently available. Leaders know that they will need to publish inspection reports and provide a copy to parents of each registered pupil.
- The proprietor has established systems in place to provide details of income and expenditure in respect of a pupil funded by the local authority, public funds or with an EHC plan. They will provide this information at pupils' annual review meetings and show this has been used to meet pupils' individual needs.
- These standard in this part is likely to be met.

## Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

### *Paragraph 33*

- The complaints policy is published on the school's website. The policy sets out clear timescales and the stages for handling a complaint. This includes ensuring that complaints can be considered initially on an informal basis.
- Complaints can also be considered on a formal basis. This includes a panel hearing if a parent is not satisfied. The procedure states that one member of any panel hearing a complaint must be independent of the management of the school. It also sets out that a parent can be accompanied at a panel hearing.
- Leaders will keep records of complaints securely. They will contain details of how complaints were resolved, and any actions taken. Records will be available for inspection.
- This standard is likely to be met.

## Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

### *Paragraph 34*

- The company intends to build a highly inclusive, unique special school that gives pupils access to a demanding, yet enjoyable curriculum in delightful surroundings. Leaders are keen to deliver on this aim. The headteacher articulates strongly her belief that the pupils deserve the very best. She, along with the assistant headteachers, is determined to provide pupils with safe and successful learning that meets their individual needs well. All necessary policies, procedures and curriculum documents are in place. Staff have already been recruited to support leaders' aims. Training to enable them to realise these goals and implement the agreed approaches is already well underway.
- The board of directors have already provided effective oversight of leaders' work so that the proposed school is likely to meet the independent school standards (the standards). Appropriate arrangements are in place to hold leaders and staff to account for their work. Directors are very well qualified to check that leaders are meeting their high expectations. They are establishing structures and systems that will provide them with the information that they need to assure themselves that the school is successful and strengthening. The company also intends to make use of other experts external to the school to further support and challenge leaders.
- Leaders have established effective systems to actively promote pupils' welfare. They have set about building an effective culture of safeguarding that puts pupils' well-being at the centre of their work. A member of the board will act as a safeguarding director to oversee this important work.
- This standard is likely to be met.

## Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- An accessibility plan is in place, meets requirements and is available on the school's website.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

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

## Proposed school details

Unique reference number	149019
DfE registration number	865/6059
Inspection number	10230788

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Special
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Dorset Centre of Excellence Ltd
Chair	Ian Comfort
Headteacher	Katie Charles
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,000 - £42,394
Telephone number	01747449820
Website	<a href="https://coombehouseschool.org.uk">https://coombehouseschool.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@coombehouseschool.org.uk">office@coombehouseschool.org.uk</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	N/A	5 – 19	5 – 19
Number of pupils on the school roll	0	200	200

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	N/A	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	0	200
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	0	200
Of which, number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan	0	200
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan	0	200



## Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	9	27
Number of part-time teaching staff	0	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	20	60

## Information about this proposed school

- The proprietor, Dorset Centre of Excellence Limited, is responsible for developing new provision for vulnerable children in Dorset and beyond on the extensive site of a former independent school. Dorset Council is a shareholder in the company but is not involved in the day-to-day running or management of the school. The board of directors is made up of individuals with suitable and relevant expertise.
- The site of the proposed school is in Wiltshire, on the border with Dorset, close to the town of Shaftesbury. The school is based in several buildings on the site and has sole use of a well-defined part of the extensive grounds. The premises were previously school buildings and have been refurbished to suit the needs of the pupils who will join the school. The site provides pupils with many opportunities to learn outdoors.
- The proposed school will be for pupils with SEMH needs and/or autism spectrum disorder. It is anticipated that all pupils will be allocated by local authorities and will have an EHC plan.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was conducted by Ofsted at the request of the Secretary of State for Education. It was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008.
- This was the proposed school's first pre-registration inspection.
- The inspector held discussions about all parts of the standards with both the headteacher, the two assistant headteachers and the company's chief operating officer.
- The inspector met with the chair of the board.
- The inspector considered documentation related to the proposed school curriculum, including the curriculum policy and schemes of work. The inspector also evaluated the complaints policy.
- The inspector considered documentation such as policies, safeguarding records, and plans in place to maintain pupils' safety. The inspector met with the headteacher and the assistant headteacher, who are the designated safeguarding leaders, to discuss arrangements to keep pupils safe.
- The inspector also toured the site and premises, both internally and externally, to determine if Part 5 of the standards is likely to be met.

## Inspection team

Caroline Dulon, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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