

Belong School Devon

138 Cowick Street, St Thomas, Exeter EX4 1HS

Inspection date

11 May 2022

Overall outcome

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

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

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

- The school's safeguarding policy meets current government requirements. It is available on the school's website. The proprietor has ensured that a suitably trained designated safeguarding lead has been appointed. This leader demonstrates a sound understanding of the role.
- Senior leaders ensure that all staff receive regular training on a range of topics, including safeguarding. Several new staff have joined the school since the previous inspection. During their induction to the school, these staff have received appropriate training in safeguarding. Consequently, staff have a clear understanding of the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils.
- The school serves pupils with social, emotional or mental health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Staff, including teachers and learning coaches, understand the individual needs and vulnerabilities of pupils. Learning mentors contact parents or carers frequently. As a result, parents are made aware of any concerns whenever appropriate at an early stage.
- Pupils feel safe at school. Pupils say that staff look after them well. Staff build up pupils' confidence so that they are better able to communicate and so keep themselves safe in a range of situations.
- Senior leaders have established a vigilant culture at the school. When concerns are raised, senior leaders communicate in a timely way with external agencies to seek help for pupils at times of greatest need.
- This independent school standard is met.

Paragraph 15

- At the time of the previous inspection, leaders did not keep accurate records of pupils' admission and attendance information. Since that time, the proprietor has increased the number of staff deployed to administer these records. Staff have been trained to use the

online system for monitoring and tracking attendance. This system is now well established in the school. Consequently, the school now has a suitable admissions register and accurate information about pupils' attendance.

- The school now meets this independent school standard.

Paragraph 11, 12, 16

- The school has a suitable health and safety policy. Staff understand and act on the policy. Leaders ensure that audits and safety checks are carried out regularly. Staff take their responsibilities seriously and so the school is a safe environment for pupils and staff.
- The school buildings are protected by modern fire protection systems. Leaders ensure that regular checks are made on alarms, fire extinguishers and fire escapes. Regular fire drills take place to make sure that staff and pupils know how to leave the building quickly and safely. Leaders are particularly aware that fire alarms can cause anxiety for some pupils. They take this into consideration when designing their approach to fire evacuation. The school meets the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- The school's risk assessment policy describes a clear approach to identifying and mitigating risks. Leaders have developed an effective process for assessing risks using an online system. For example, they consider the risks involved in pupils attending off-site activities, such as physical education lessons at a local sports centre.
- The school meets the independent school standards in these paragraphs.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 23(1), 23(1)(a)–(c), 24(1), 24(1)(a)–(c), 25, 26, 27, 27(a)–(b), 28(1), 28(1)(a)–(d), 28(2), 28(2)(a)–(b), 29(1), 29(1)(a)–(b)

- Since the previous inspection, the school has relocated from the Wonford Community and Learning Centre on Burnthouse Lane in Exeter. In January 2022, the school moved to new premises two miles away on Cowick Street.
- The school continues to operate from a second site in Bishop's Tawton in north Devon. However, it does not use the site in Newton Abbott that was operating at the time of the previous inspection.
- The Cowick Street site is a converted residential day-care centre. These premises are much bigger than those previously being used. The proprietor carried out significant refurbishment work on the buildings before the school moved in. For example, the proprietor fitted specialist flooring to ensure that the acoustic properties of all rooms are suitable for teaching.
- The classrooms are spread across two buildings connected by a corridor. Specialist classrooms are provided for science, mathematics, English, music and art. Each pupil also has a desk for individual work in one of five study rooms. A large communal area with a well-equipped kitchen is available for social times. The kitchen provides a suitable supply of drinking water, which is clearly marked and readily accessible for pupils. The facilities also include a sensory room and an English intervention room.

- All classrooms are spacious and well lit, the great majority with natural light from external windows. All rooms are suitably furnished and equipped for their purposes. External lighting is fitted at the entrance points to the building.
- Six toilets in individual cubicles are provided for the sole use pupils. One of these, on the ground floor, is suitable for disabled access. There is an adequate supply of hot and cold water at sinks and in the toilets. The temperature of the hot water is regularly checked to ensure that it does not pose a scalding risk.
- The building has a clearly marked room set aside specifically for the short-term medical treatment of pupils. This room has a toilet and washing facilities.
- The site has a small but well-maintained outdoor area equipped with picnic benches. This area is secure. Pupils receive physical education lessons at a nearby sports centre. The sports centre has appropriate changing facilities for pupils to use.
- The Bishop's Tawton site is a converted Methodist church. The teaching rooms are spread over two floors of the building. These facilities remain the same as they were at the previous inspection. The rooms are well maintained by the proprietor and subject to the same standard of monitoring and upkeep as those at the Cowick Street site. Together, the two sites provide ample accommodation for 50 pupils, the school's maximum number on roll.
- The independent school standards in this part are met and are likely to continue to be met if the material change is approved by the Department for Education (DfE).

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1), 32(1)(c)

- The school's safeguarding policy is available on the school website.
- This independent school standard is met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a)–(c)

- The proprietor and senior leaders have implemented the action plan they submitted to the DfE following the previous inspection.
- At the previous inspection, senior leaders did not monitor rigorously the school's compliance with the independent school standards (the standards). Since then, they have introduced new systems to check on compliance with the standards. For example, risk assessments are planned in an agreed format and held online. Training for staff has ensured that other systems, such as the online attendance register and admissions register, are now used accurately.
- Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have raised the expectations that staff have of pupils. For example, records of pupils' achievements show that staff are diligent in their record-keeping and suitably ambitious for pupils.
- Senior leaders are aware that changes to the operation of the school this academic year have not been welcomed by some staff. The proprietor has introduced a local advisory

board so that it better understands, and takes account of, staff views about their workload and well-being.

- The proprietor and senior leaders demonstrate sufficient knowledge and understanding to ensure that the standards are met consistently.
- This independent school standard is now met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The proprietor has prepared an accessibility plan for the new premises. The school complies with Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

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 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.

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
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	147471
DfE registration number	878/6082
Inspection number	10233237

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 school
School status	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	13 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Belong Learning Community Interest Company
Chair	James Evans
Headteacher	Ms Roz Harman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£28,000 to £34,000
Telephone number	0300 303 5755
Website	www.belonglearning.co.uk
Email address	reception.devon@belonglearning.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	13 to 15 July 2021

Information about this school

- Belong School Devon is operated by the proprietor, Belong Learning, which is a community interest company. Belong Learning also operates an independent special school in Gloucestershire.
- The school was registered in November 2019 under the name CMAS School Devon. The school changed its name in September 2021.
- The school operates from two sites. The main site is 138 Cowick Street, St Thomas, Exeter EX4 1HS. The second, smaller site is in north Devon at Bishop's Tawton Methodist

Church, Old Exeter Road, Bishop's Tawton EX32 0AL. The school has ceased using its site at Newton Abbott in south Devon.

- Pupils are placed at the school by their local authority. All have social, emotional or mental health needs. All pupils at the school have an EHC plan.

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.
- In July 2021, Ofsted conducted the school's first standard inspection. The school was judged to require improvement. Two of the independent school standards were not met.
- On 22 September 2021, the DfE issued the proprietor with a notice requiring the proprietor to prepare an action plan to show how the unmet standards would be addressed. The school submitted the action plan within the required timeframe. The plan was evaluated on 11 November 2021 and found to be acceptable.
- This was the first progress monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement in July 2021. The inspection was conducted with no notice.
- In order to check compliance with the independent school standards, the inspector met with the chair and two members of the proprietor board, the headteacher and senior leaders. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector held meetings with staff, including teachers and learning mentors. The inspector met with pupils and looked at examples of their work. A range of documents was considered, including documents relating to safeguarding, the school's single central record of appointment checks, and admissions and attendance records.

The school's proposed change to school premises

The school has applied to the DfE to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, the inspector checked whether the school meets the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **The school meets the independent school standards relevant to the material change. The material change has already been implemented.**

- The inspector considered the suitability of the premises and the welfare, health and safety arrangements at the Cowick Street site. The school moved to these premises in January 2022.

Inspection team

Paul Williams, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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