

# Coombe House School

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

**Inspection date**

18 October 2022

**Overall outcome**

**The school does not meet 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 proprietor delayed the school's opening in the autumn term to enable staff to complete a comprehensive package of staff training. This included safeguarding training in line with statutory guidance. Staff now better understand what to do if they suspect pupils may be at risk of significant harm. They report concerns promptly. Leaders work closely with external agencies such as social workers to ensure that pupils and families get the timely support they need.
- Nonetheless, weaknesses in the safeguarding culture remain. Despite recent training, staff did not apply the agreed procedures for reporting significant incidents to the designated safeguarding lead. In addition, some staff do not understand some other important safeguarding procedures, for example how to deal with allegations about members of staff.
- The interim headteacher is in the process of identifying and improving weak safeguarding practice. She challenges concerns head on and is working productively to ensure that the safeguarding systems that she expects to be in place are. Safeguarding and health and safety now form standard items on the agenda for all meetings. Staff are being retrained. This weighty piece of work is beginning to make a positive difference. However, there has not been enough time to secure an effective and embedded safeguarding culture.
- The number of registered pupils has decreased considerably since May 2022. During this time, there have been three interim headteachers. Current leaders do not have sufficient information about the onward placements for some pupils who have left. As a result, some important records, including those relating to safeguarding, have been slow to be transferred to new settings. Leaders are working diligently to ensure that they have all the up-to-date information about current pupils who are registered at the school.
- The interim headteacher is ensuring that leaders are responding swiftly to a recent safeguarding audit. For example, a senior leader is visiting the alternative learning

provisions that the school uses to assure themselves of safeguarding arrangements. This provides accurate information about whether each setting is Ofsted registered. However, some other actions, such as senior leaders undertaking allegations training, are yet to take place.

- There is not an up-to-date safeguarding policy on the school's website as is required. There are two different safeguarding policies on the school's website. One is dated November 2021 and the other April 2022. Both policies provide inaccurate information about current personnel in the school who hold safeguarding responsibilities.
- The safeguarding page on the school's website names the current designated safeguarding lead and deputy safeguarding leads. However, there is no information about how to contact them. This makes it difficult for anyone to raise a concern. This potentially puts pupils at risk.
- Pupils are currently undertaking a staggered transition into school. Many pupils attend part time. Pupils attending school say that they feel safe. A very small number of pupils who remain registered at the school do not attend. Leaders do not have sufficient oversight of these pupils' well-being.
- The single central record that records checks on the suitability of staff to work with children meets requirements.
- The standard in this paragraph are not met.

#### *Paragraph 9*

- Immediately after the school's closure in May 2022, the proprietor reviewed the school's behaviour policy. At this time, the proprietor found that the policy was fit for purpose, but its implementation was poor.
- Since September 2022, much work has been undertaken to ensure that the behaviour policy is being implemented more effectively. All staff have been trained in the school's approach to managing pupils' behaviour, including the use of restraint. There have been no restraints this academic year. No pupils have been suspended.
- There is now a clear delineation between the reporting of safeguarding concerns and behaviour incidents. A record is kept of the sanctions imposed on pupils for serious misbehaviour.
- However, some of the school's work to ensure that the agreed systems are used to plan onward provision for pupils is not yet sufficiently embedded. For example, there remain inconsistencies in how staff review behaviour incidents. This means that some pupils' risk assessments are not updated in the light of behaviour concerns. At times there are weaknesses in the quality of staff interactions with pupils.
- The standard in this paragraph is not met.

#### *Paragraph 10, 11, 14*

- There is an up-to-date health and safety policy in place. A key team of personnel ensures that this is implemented effectively. Considerable work has taken place to implement essential changes to the building and school grounds to maintain pupils' health and safety. For example, windows that were broken or did not have safety glass or appropriate safety film have been replaced. Additional fencing has been erected at the back of the school buildings between Coombe House School and the

original building of the old St Mary's School. This prevents pupils' access to a walled area and steep bank that was previously unsafe. Pupils have no access to the original building of St Mary's School.

- The large sports hall and extensive wooded area are now beyond the immediate school boundary. There is no unsupervised access. Gates to the school's main site are locked during the school day.
- Staff supervision is suitable in classrooms and at social times. There is a one-way system for cars and taxis dropping off and collecting pupils at the beginning and end of the school day. This is well supervised and ensures that pupils are safe.
- The proprietor has ensured that leaders implement the anti-bullying strategy that is in place. When incidents happen, pupils say that adults help sort it out straightaway. Leaders keep a record of when any incidents of bullying happen, including racist incidents, and what action has been taken.
- These standards in these paragraphs are met.

*Paragraph 16(a), 16(b)*

- There is a risk assessment policy. There are risk assessments for the school site and classrooms. The interim headteacher is supporting staff to strengthen the effectiveness of the writing of risk assessments for specific off-site activities. However, this work is too recent to have sufficient impact. Risk assessments do not include precise information about how risk is mitigated.
- All pupils have individual risk assessments. Leaders are working systematically to improve these. However, this work is very recent. When serious incidents occur, not all risk assessments are amended sufficiently well.
- This standard in this paragraph is not met.
- Overall, the standards in this part are not met.

## Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

*Paragraph 25, 29*

- The premises, accommodation and facilities are maintained to a high standard by a team based at the Dorset Centre of Excellence next door to the school. All the relevant health and safety checks are being completed. Where shortfalls are found, leaders ensure that these are acted on quickly.
- Checks of the large outdoor space are conducted regularly.
- There is a hall in which pupils undertake sport. There is a well-resourced area for pupils to play in.
- The standards in these paragraphs are met.

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

### *Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)*

- The proprietor has appointed an interim headteacher with strong knowledge in leading specialist educational provision and care. The recruitment for substantive leadership is under way.
- The proprietor has commissioned specialist staff, such as educational psychologists and those with specific skills in therapeutic care, to work with leaders. This enables new staff to start to undertake specialist training to support pupils' social, emotional, and mental health and academic needs. This results in pupils' return to education proving increasingly successful. However, the proprietor is acutely aware that many pupils are part time and do not yet receive a full-time education.
- The proprietor has ensured that the significant changes that were required to the site to assure pupils' safety are complete.
- The chair of the proprietor body has a clear understanding of the independent school standards (the standards). However, members of the board and some school leaders are developing their knowledge of the standards. The proprietor has not ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- The proprietor has not ensured that the standards for the arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school are met.
- The standards in this part are not met.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school does not meet 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, as set out in the annex of this report. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

## School details

Unique reference number	149019
DfE registration number	865/6059
Inspection number	10257189

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	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	37
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	0
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Dorset Centre of Excellence Ltd
Chair	Ian Comfort
Headteacher	Dr Sharina Klassens
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,000 to £42,394
Telephone number	01747 449 820
Website	<a href="http://www.coombehouseschool.org.uk">www.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

## Information about this school

- The proprietor is Dorset Centre of Excellence Limited. Dorset County Council is the major shareholder in the company, but is not involved in the day-to-day running of the school. There have been changes to the membership of the proprietor body since the school opened.

- Dorset Centre of Excellence is based in the former main building of a previous independent school. Coombe House School is not based in this building and pupils have no access to it. Coombe House School is based in several newer buildings on the site. Clear boundaries are in place to demark the school site.
- The school opened in May 2022 with 50 pupils registered. The proprietor conducted an emergency closure of the school one week after it opened. The school reopened on 23 June 2022 and then closed early for the summer break on 9 July 2022. The proprietor delayed opening the school to pupils to 13 September 2022.
- Since the school opened, there has been one substantive headteacher and three interim headteachers. The most recent interim headteacher took up post in August 2022. The recruitment process for a substantive headteacher is under way. The school has been subject to significant staff changes since it opened in May 2022.
- The school is in Wiltshire, on the border of Dorset, close to the town of Shaftesbury. All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan. Pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs and/or autism spectrum disorder.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. This was in response to a serious complaint relating to safeguarding, pupils' welfare and safety, and leadership and management.
- The inspector checked the school's compliance with some independent school standards relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils, the school's premises and the quality of leadership and management.
- This inspection was conducted with no notice.
- The inspector met with the interim headteacher, other senior leaders, staff, pupils and the chair of the proprietor board. She also held a meeting with representatives from Dorset commissioning team for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- A range of documentation was reviewed, including policies, health and safety records and safeguarding records.

## Inspection team

Julie Carrington, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector



## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **The school does not meet the following independent school standards**

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

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
  - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
  - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that–
  - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively;
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
  - 16 (a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
  - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

#### **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.

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