

Inspection of The Outdoors School

Straw Barn, Barton Lane, Shillingford Abbot, Exeter, Devon EX2 9QQ

Inspection dates: 18 to 20 October 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils arrive at The Outdoors School having experienced disruption to their previous education. Over time, they settle well in the outdoor environment. Staff build trusting relationships with pupils. This is the cornerstone of the school's success and makes pupils feel safe. Many parents and carers commented on the 'life-changing' impact the school has had on restoring their children's interest in education.

Leaders expect pupils to thrive socially and academically. Pupils have seen significant improvements in their learning, attendance and behaviour the longer they are in school. This is because staff identify their needs quickly and provide appropriate support. Consequently, pupils experience success and improve their confidence as learners.

Some pupils present with complex and difficult behaviour. Nonetheless, most behave well. Staff make sure that pupils know what they expect of them. They reward positive behaviour and deal with challenging situations calmly. Pupils state that bullying is rare. When it occurs, leaders deal with it promptly.

Staff nurture pupils' talents and interests. Many pupils look forward to planning the lunch menu and cooking on the open fire. Weekly enrichment sessions help to broaden pupils' independence and life skills. These include taking public transport, swimming and trips in the local area.

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

Leaders, including the proprietor body, have taken decisive action to address the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. They have created robust quality assurance processes to improve the school further. Leaders have ensured that they continue to meet all of the independent school standards in full.

Leaders thoroughly assess pupils' academic and social needs as they transition into school. They know that many have missed a significant amount of education before joining the school. The curriculum, pastoral and woodland staff plan a bespoke offer to match pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. Over time, pupils respond well. Their confidence and resilience build gradually. Most go on to study a broad range of academic subjects.

Recently, leaders redesigned the curriculum. They have thought creatively about how it considers pupils' needs and interests. Leaders have mapped out what pupils need in order to be successful in individual subjects and project-based learning. Much learning connects with, and builds on, pupils' prior knowledge. For example, in mathematics, pupils revisit work on measuring and angles when making furniture. However, not all staff identify precisely enough what they want pupils to know and remember. This limits the progress that some pupils make through the curriculum.

Leaders recognise the need to revisit and refine their curriculum thinking with this in mind.

Leaders place a sharper focus on pupils securing the basic skills in reading and mathematics than previously. Specialist staff provide extra support and bring out the best in pupils. They help the weakest readers and mathematicians develop the knowledge they need to be successful later in school. Staff use assessment information skilfully to pinpoint where pupils have gaps in their learning. They use carefully chosen books to ignite pupils' interest in learning and vocabulary. Despite this, a minority of pupils do not enjoy reading. Leaders and staff have not yet found ways to promote reading for pleasure for all pupils.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff use targets from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans in the content they teach. They break these down into small, manageable steps to help pupils achieve their potential. Leaders keep these plans under regular review to make sure that pupils get the most effective support. In most cases, the academic and pastoral curriculums closely match the needs of all pupils.

Leaders thread pupils' personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education through lessons and assemblies. Staff use 'big questions' to explore relevant topics. These include the rule of law, how to budget and safe touch. This helps pupils understand themselves, others and their role in society. Pupils learn the importance of tolerance and respect. Many proudly say, 'We are all different but equal.' Leaders fulfil the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Nevertheless, the school's work to deepen pupils' cultural understanding is less developed. Some pupils are not as well prepared for living in a multicultural society as they could be.

Staff take effective action to help pupils overcome any barriers to learning. They act as positive role models and reinforce expected routines and social skills. The longer pupils attend the school, the better they regulate their behaviour. Leaders intervene swiftly if pupils' attendance becomes an issue.

Leaders have high aspirations for pupils. They encourage them to think about the world of work and adult life. Older pupils take part in volunteering and work experience. This helps to inform their preferred career choices.

Most staff are proud to work at the school. They benefit from a carefully planned induction process. Leaders keep a close check on staff well-being. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They value the support and guidance given to them.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The proprietor has created an effective safeguarding culture in the school. Staff receive regular training on key issues, such as online safety, radicalisation and

consent. They understand the vulnerabilities of pupils at the school and adapt the curriculum appropriately. Leaders act quickly when staff raise concerns. They work well with internal and external agencies to minimise pupils' risk of harm.

Leaders ensure that the required pre-employment checks for new staff are in place. The safeguarding policies and procedures are in line with government guidance. These are published on the school's website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In a few subjects, leaders have not identified precisely enough what they want pupils to know and remember. This means that pupils do not develop the same depth of knowledge across all subjects. Leaders must ensure that the curriculums for all subjects identify the most important knowledge they want pupils to know and remember over time.
- Leaders do not ensure that pupils learn about cultural diversity in enough depth. As a result, some pupils are not as well prepared for living in a multicultural society as they could be. Leaders should ensure that the taught curriculum and wider enrichment opportunities are effective in supporting pupils' understanding of cultural diversity.

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	146200
DfE registration number	878/6075
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10239794
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Outdoors Group
Chair	Shevek Pring
Headteacher	Robyn Vincent
Annual fees (day pupils)	£42,000 to £64,000
Telephone number	01392 832632
Website	www.theoutdoorsschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@theoutdoorsschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 to 12 March 2020

Information about this school

- The Outdoors School is an independent special school. Since the previous inspection, the school has applied for material changes to increase the age range of pupils and to add an additional site. The current capacity now stands at 90. The school admits pupils from the age of seven to 16 years.
- The school is located over three sites:
 - Straw Barn, Shillingford Abbot, Exeter, Devon EX2 9QQ
 - Tiverton Adventure Playground, Cowleymoor, Tiverton, Devon EX16 6HH
 - Bridge House Farm, South Brent, Devon TQ10 9PF.
- Teaching takes place outdoors.
- The school caters for pupils with a range of SEND. These include social, emotional and mental health needs and autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan.
- There is no governing body.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider.

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 meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, and site managers to discuss aspects of the school. The lead inspector met with directors of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, PSHE education and the school's specialist provision in forest skills. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with the head of teaching and learning, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, talked to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding documentation. They met with the school's designated safeguarding lead and scrutinised safeguarding checks carried out on staff working at the school and the single central record. Inspectors considered how well safeguarding leaders act on concerns about pupils' welfare

and safety. Inspectors talked to pupils and staff about the school's safeguarding practice.

- The lead inspector held a telephone call with Plymouth local authority.
- Inspectors conducted a range of activities to confirm whether the independent school standards were met in full. This included health and safety checks of the premises.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments and emails from parents, and responses to the pupil and staff surveys.

Inspection team

Dale Burr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Tracy Hannon

Ofsted Inspector

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