

Inspection of Belong School Devon

138 Cowick Street, Exeter EX4 1HS

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 May 2023

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?

Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Staff know pupils well. They carefully plan pupils' individual timetables and curriculum to match their academic and personal needs, as set out in their education, health and care (EHC) plan. Effective use of praise, encouragement and challenge means that individual pupils' needs are well met. Most pupils attend regularly and say that they enjoy school.

There is a calm and orderly school environment. Staff help pupils to develop the tools to recognise and express their emotions effectively. Pupils say that staff are kind. They trust staff to listen and help them when needed.

The highly individualised curriculum ensures that pupils gain recognised qualifications before moving on to college or employment post-16. Pupils' talents and interests are nurtured. For example, they learn to play the guitar or go bus-spotting. Through these opportunities, pupils develop life skills such as resilience, determination and personal safety awareness.

Pupils learn about the importance of healthy eating in cookery lessons. Staff promote pupils' mental and physical health and well-being. Most pupils enjoy the regular opportunities to take part in sporting activities. For example, they learn to play golf, paddle a kayak and play team games.

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

Leaders, including the proprietors, have an accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. There are systems in place to check the effectiveness of leaders' actions accurately. Leaders meet their statutory duties, and all independent school standards are met.

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum that meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have identified the essential knowledge they want pupils to remember across most subject curriculums. In English, mathematics and some wider curriculum subjects, such as art, teaching supports pupils to practise and remember prior knowledge, skills and vocabulary effectively. Teachers check pupils' understanding and rectify misconceptions quickly. For example, in mathematics, pupils explain their thinking when solving problems to identify and correct errors with their teacher. This helps pupils to build secure knowledge over time.

Leaders expect all pupils to learn to read well. Pupils who need additional support to secure their phonic knowledge are identified swiftly. An ambitious and carefully sequenced reading curriculum develops pupils' fluency, confidence and enjoyment in reading effectively. In addition to reading lessons, there is a reading club that pupils are encouraged to attend. Books and teaching materials are highly personalised to help pupils engage with individual learning activities. Gaps in pupils' knowledge are closed effectively.

Nevertheless, there are a few subject curriculums that are not as well developed. The essential knowledge that leaders want pupils to retain is not identified clearly. This makes it difficult for teachers to plan and check precisely what pupils must know and remember. Some pupils have superficial subject knowledge as teaching does not help to recap important content effectively. Leaders do not check that pupils remember some important curriculum content, such as anti-bullying information. This means some pupils are unsure about what to do.

While there is a personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum in place, leaders are working with staff to strengthen the school's personal development offer. In particular, leaders want pupils to understand how they can make a difference and contribute positively to society. They are developing their career guidance and work experience opportunities with this in mind. Pupils learn about cultures, religions and people's lives that are different from their own. They have a strong sense of fairness and justice. Pupils' knowledge of life in modern Britain is developing as the curriculum strengthens and they learn to discuss and debate issues effectively.

Before joining the school, most pupils missed significant parts of their education. Leaders work with pupils and their families to identify barriers to school attendance. With appropriate support from staff and external agencies, pupil attendance typically improves over time. Pupils develop positive attitudes to learning and school life. Leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Positive working relationships and individualised support ensure that pupils gain strategies to successfully manage their own social, emotional and mental health.

The well-being of pupils and staff has a high profile at the school. Leaders support staff to manage their workload. Staff appreciate leaders' consideration and care. They are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders complete the necessary safeguarding checks before staff and volunteers begin working at the school. Leaders have recently introduced new systems to assure themselves that their records are up to date and accurate.

Staff receive training to help them identify the needs of vulnerable pupils. They record concerns and share them with leaders responsible for safeguarding pupils. Leaders respond appropriately and in a timely manner. They seek advice from external agencies to try and secure support for families in need.

Pupils are taught the importance of consent and how to use social media safely.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders have not identified the essential knowledge they want pupils to know and remember across some subject curriculums. As a result, teaching does not check on the important concepts that pupils need to learn. Pupils are unable to recall important knowledge and make connections between concepts that would help them to build on prior learning. Where this occurs, leaders need to identify essential subject content, ensuring assessment is precise, so that pupils know and remember more.

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	147471
DfE registration number	878/6082
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10267699
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Belong Learning CiC
CEO	James Evans
Headteacher	Roz Harman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£39,000
Telephone number	0300 3035755
Website	www.belonglearning.co.uk
Email address	info@belonglearning.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 to 15 July 2021

Information about this school

- Belong Learning CiC is the proprietary body.
- The school opened in November 2019. It provides places for pupils in receipt of an EHC plan.
- The school operates over two sites at Cowick Street and Bishop's Tawton.
- Pupils from Devon County attend the school.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

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 set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff, pupils and directors, including the chief executive officer and the consultant chief financial officer at the Cowick Street school site.
- The inspectors met online with the special educational needs coordinator and the site operations lead at Bishop's Tawton school site.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, art and PSHE. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors also sampled pupils' work in geography.
- The inspectors observed pupils during social times, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils and leaders about opportunities for pupils' personal development.
- The inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding documentation, including records of safeguarding checks carried out on staff working at the school. They considered how well the designated safeguarding lead acts on concerns about pupils' safety and welfare. The inspectors spoke to pupils, staff and governors about safeguarding practices.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including policies and record-keeping for behaviour management, attendance and health and safety.

Inspection team

Marie Thomas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Favager-Dalton

His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023