

Inspection of Belong School Gloucestershire

Church Lane, Whaddon, Gloucester, Gloucestershire GL4 0UF

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 June 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Many pupils have not had the best start to their education before joining the school. At Belong, they get another chance. Most embrace this fresh opportunity, thriving in the process.

Leaders and staff build warm and trusting relationships with pupils. This is the linchpin of the school's success. Staff invest time to get to know pupils' individual needs. They plan a highly personalised curriculum that is relevant to pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Over time, this contributes to better attendance and engagement in learning.

The school is a calm place in which to learn. Well-established morning routines in 'the hub' encourage pupils to get off to a positive start to the day. Staff manage pupils' complex behaviours skilfully. Pupils say that they feel safe, including from bullying.

Leaders seek creative ways to engage pupils in new experiences based on their talents and interests. These range from blacksmithing courses to landscaping and skiing trips abroad. Pupils particularly enjoy the boxing programme. It successfully develops their physical and mental well-being, confidence and positive decision-making.

Parents and carers hold favourable views of the school. They typically commented on the 'dedication of staff' and how their children 'love coming to school again'.

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

The proprietor knows the school well and routinely checks on the work of leaders. The proprietor has implemented improved measures to hold leaders accountable for their actions. For example, nominated staff ensure that the premises, including the shower block, are well maintained. The proprietor fulfils its statutory duties effectively. All of the independent school standards (the standards) are met. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have designed an ambitious and well-sequenced curriculum. They have set out what pupils should learn and when. Staff break learning down into small, manageable chunks. This helps pupils build their confidence and increase their knowledge step by step. However, in a minority of subjects, the curriculum is not as coherently organised. Staff do not revisit the most important content regularly enough. This prevents pupils from building their subject-specific knowledge and skills sufficiently well.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They explain new learning clearly. For example, in mathematics, teachers take the time to show pupils how to complete tasks successfully. Pupils respond well to individual support. Teachers regularly

assess and adapt lessons skilfully to meet pupils' precise needs. Consequently, pupils experience success.

Leaders have revamped the English curriculum. They have chosen texts that are rich in vocabulary and cover a range of themes, including classic and contemporary novels. Teachers provide opportunities for extended writing. This helps pupils apply their core writing skills in preparation for GCSE courses. Most pupils read fluently. Those at the early stages of reading receive bespoke phonics intervention. Well-trained teachers assess where pupils have gaps in their knowledge. They use this information to target help accordingly. These pupils are catching up quickly. Leaders are developing a reading culture. They have introduced dedicated reading time and updated the school library. Despite these improvements, there is not a strong enough reading culture across the school. Pupils do not read widely enough in different subjects.

Most pupils have experienced significant disruption to their education before joining the school. Over time, pupils' attendance improves. Leaders follow up on absences swiftly. They are proactive. For example, staff carry out regular home visits where necessary. They work with external agencies and families to prioritise pupils' safety and well-being.

Leaders and staff have high expectations of pupils' conduct and behaviour. Disruption to learning is uncommon. High staff-to-pupil ratios mean that pupils receive effective individual support. Staff act as positive role models. They teach pupils to recognise and communicate their emotions. This helps pupils to regulate how they are feeling. Staff resolve issues quickly with restorative conversations. They amend pupils' risk assessments where appropriate, for example if pupils leave the building without permission. Incidents of poor behaviour have decreased significantly.

Leaders nurture pupils' wider skills and character development. The related curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn about healthy relationships, including the topics of consent and contraception. Pupils enjoy cooking and completing projects in the outdoor area to complement their formal learning. 'Drop-down' days, when the normal timetable is suspended, help to broaden pupils' understanding of respect and tolerance. For example, pupils recognise the importance of equality for people with protected characteristics.

Pupils gain recognised national qualifications before moving on to post-16 destinations. Leaders provide pupils with relevant careers education and advice about paths available to them. These and other experiences prepare pupils well for their next stage of education, employment or training.

The headteacher is knowledgeable and committed. Senior leaders are clear about their responsibilities, including understanding the standards. Staff are proud to work at Belong. They value the programme of ongoing training to develop their practice and expertise.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders prioritise pupils' safety. They provide regular training on important topics, such as sexualised behaviour and exploitation. Staff have the knowledge to identify when a pupil might be at risk of harm. Leaders take swift and decisive action when staff raise concerns. They collaborate well with safeguarding partners to help minimise the risk of harm to pupils.

Leaders take necessary measures to ensure that staff are suitable to work with pupils. 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 minority of subjects, staff do not coherently organise or revisit frequently enough the most important knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn. This makes it more difficult for pupils to build their subject-specific knowledge and skills sufficiently well. Leaders should ensure that staff emphasise and revisit the important knowledge and skills that pupils need to develop over time in all subjects.
- Leaders have not fully embedded a culture of reading. Pupils do not read widely enough across the curriculum. Leaders should seek to provide increased opportunities to broaden pupils' reading experiences across all subjects.

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	146671
DfE registration number	916/6025
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10267692
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	12 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	30
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Belong Learning CiC
Chair	James Evans
Headteacher	Janie James-Ashburner
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,000 to £105,000
Telephone number	0300 303 5755
Website	www.belonglearning.co.uk/gloucestershire
Email address	info@belonglearning.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 and 10 July 2019

Information about this school

- Belong Gloucestershire is an independent special school. 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. These places are funded by two local authorities.
- The school has exclusive use of a large sports hall adjacent to the main building.
- The school is registered for 32 pupils between the ages of 12 and 16 years.
- The previous standard inspection took place in July 2019. A material change inspection took place in September 2021. The school did not meet all of the relevant independent school standards relating to the material change. A progress monitoring inspection took place in October 2022. The school did not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during that inspection.
- There have been changes to the leadership of the school since the previous standard inspection. The current headteacher took up post in June 2021.
- The school uses one registered alternative provision.
- The school has admitted pupils above the registered age range. Prior to this inspection, it had not notified the Department for Education of this change.

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.

- 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, senior leaders and other school staff to discuss aspects of the school's work. The lead inspector met with two members of the proprietor body and a representative of Gloucestershire County Council.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English (including early reading), mathematics, art and food technology. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, talked to pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector sampled leaders' curriculum documentation and pupils' work in physical education, business studies, and personal, social and health education.
- 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 staff and pupils about the school's safeguarding practices.

- 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, supervision during social times and when learning took place in the community, and scrutiny of risk assessments and the policies in place to promote the well-being of pupils.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and responses to the staff and pupil surveys. The lead inspector spoke to several parents and carers on the telephone.

The school's progress in meeting previously failed standards

During the inspection, we checked whether the school now meets the independent school standards that it was judged to have failed at its previous progress monitoring inspection on 12 October 2022.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school now meets the previously failed standards.**
- At the previous inspection in October 2022, leaders did not have effective systems to oversee pupils' welfare when they were being educated off site. Since then, leaders have introduced rigorous processes to check the well-being and safety of pupils when they are being taught on or off site.
- In October 2022, inspectors found that the school offered pupils physical education (PE) but did not provide them with shower facilities as required. The school has rectified this. It now offers pupils adequate changing facilities when they take part in PE, including shower facilities.
- At the time of the previous progress monitoring inspection, the proprietor had not ensured that all leaders fully understood the requirements of the independent school standards (the standards). The requirements of Part 8 of the standards were not met. During this inspection, the proprietor and school leaders demonstrated that they have a sufficiently detailed understanding of the requirements of the standards. As a result, they now ensure that the requirements of these standards are met in full.

The school now meets the following 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.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 23(1) Subject to sub paragraph (2), the standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 23(1)(c) suitable changing accommodation and showers are provided for pupils aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education.

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; and
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Inspection team

Dale Burr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jen Edwards

Ofsted Inspector

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