

# The Forum School

Shillingstone, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 0QS

**Inspection date**

18 July 2023

**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 school's last standard inspection took place in November 2022. At that time, the school had experienced significant turbulence in leadership and high staff turnover. While the leadership of the school is now settled, challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff have continued. The proprietor has attempted to address this by transferring staff from another setting within the same group, and by recruiting staff from overseas. However, processes for recruiting staff safely have not always been followed. For example, leaders do not ensure that the single central record includes all of the staff working in the school.
- In recent months, the local authority designated officer (LADO) has received a high volume of allegations about staff conduct and unsafe practices at the school. Leaders are aware of the range of concerns and have begun to address these. For example, the proprietor arranged for a critical review to be carried out to consider the inappropriate use of door holding. In the light of this review, staff have been retrained. Staff are clear that this is not accepted practice in the school.
- Leaders have responded to a pattern of concern related to the handling of medication for pupils. They have strengthened the arrangements for the storage and administration of medicines. However, the new arrangements are not yet reflected in the associated policy.
- Although leaders have begun to address some of the recurring themes in staff conduct, they do not yet have sufficient oversight of the high number of individual cases requiring investigation. Investigations initiated several months ago are still ongoing. The proprietor has not ensured that school leaders are kept up to date with the progress of investigations. Nor has the proprietor ensured that school leaders have the full picture as to the historic conduct of new staff. As a result, the headteacher is not able to fulfil his responsibilities for managing allegations about staff in the way set out in the school's safeguarding policy.

- Leaders understand their duty to notify the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) where the outcome of an investigation shows that the requirements to inform are met. However, they are not able to demonstrate that they fulfil this legal duty, in line with their safeguarding policy, where it is appropriate that they do so.
- The arrangements for safeguarding pupils are set out in a comprehensive policy which is published on the school's website. However, there are aspects of the policy which are not followed in practice. This also represents a lack of appropriate regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- The standards in this paragraph are not met.

*Paragraphs 11, 13, 14, 15*

- The proprietor has developed a comprehensive set of health and safety policies. These include useful detail for staff on a range of issues such as accidents and incidents and the control of hazardous substances.
- The first aid policy is implemented as intended. There are sufficient trained first aiders on site to manage accidents and injury to pupils and staff. There is a well-supplied medical treatment room.
- There are reports of incidents in which pupils have been left unsupervised. Where this has happened, leaders have consulted with the LADO and initiated investigations. During the inspection, no pupils were observed in unsupervised situations. All pupils were accompanied by at least one member of staff at all times.
- Most staff take their responsibility for supervising pupils very seriously. However, they report difficulties getting staff to relieve them if they need to step out of their role momentarily. Occasionally, where pupils require more than one staff member to support them, the additional staff member may be located at a distance or may not be an individual who is able to meet the pupil's needs well enough.
- Leaders maintain admissions and attendance registers within their school information systems. Almost all pupils attend school well.
- The standards in these paragraphs are met.

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

- The proprietor has developed a high-level risk assessment policy which makes responsibilities clear.
- Following incidents in which pupils' behaviour has given concern, for example where physical intervention has been needed, detailed records are kept and a review informs the individual pupil's risk assessment. In turn, the risk assessment informs a review of the pupil's behaviour support plan. In this way, leaders reduce the risks associated with heightened behaviour. Staff describe a culture of learning from each incident which helps pupils to improve their behaviour over time.
- The standards in this paragraph are met.
- Overall, the standards in this part are not met.

## Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

### *Paragraphs 18 to 20*

- Leaders have carried out the vetting checks to meet the requirements of these standards.
- During the inspection it was identified that leaders had not checked whether support staff, including agency staff, who are working in regulated activity are prohibited from doing so. Leaders rectified this by making the necessary checks on the day of the inspection.
- The standards in these paragraphs are met.

### *Paragraph 21*

- Leaders have not ensured that a substantial group of new staff, many of whom have been recruited from overseas, are included in the single central record. These staff have begun working with pupils on site.
- Prohibition checks on support and supply staff, made on the day of the inspection, are not reflected in the single central record.
- Omissions from the single central record apply to new staff only. Staff who were appointed longer ago, and agency staff, are included. The record indicates that the appropriate checks were made.
- The standards in this paragraph are not met.
- Overall, the standards in this part are not met.

## Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

### *Paragraphs 23 to 24, 26 to 29*

- The school benefits from an ample site which includes the provisions required to meet most standards in Part 5.
- The standards in these paragraphs are met.

### *Paragraph 25*

- The proprietor does not ensure that the site is well maintained. Pupils and staff experience long delays before larger maintenance jobs are completed. A prominent part of the site has been cordoned off and made inaccessible for an extended period. Over time, this has contributed to a lack of confidence in the proprietor among staff.
- Outdoor areas have a tired appearance. Around the site there are discarded items that have not been tidied away. These are typically classroom resources such as books, chairs and play equipment, including stray balls and baskets. These items have been left out, exposed to the elements for some time. There is a lack of care and pride in the appearance of the site.
- Poisonous plants are not removed promptly.
- The proprietor provides a system for reporting maintenance jobs. However, this is not well used by staff, who have become accustomed to the general state of disrepair.
- The standard in this paragraph is not met.

- Overall, the standards in this part are not met.

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

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

- Leaders, including the proprietor, recognise that there are necessary improvements to be made. They have begun to address some of the specific areas of weakness. However, this work is in its infancy. Action planning is superficial. There is a reliance on quick fixes.
- The proprietor is taking steps to increase the efficiency of investigations into staff conduct but it is too early to see the impact of this. The proprietor does not focus sufficiently on addressing the contextual factors behind incidents. For example, staff are overstretched and sometimes suffer injury in the course of their work. The effects of these factors on their decision-making are not fully appreciated.
- The proprietor does not engage well with staff or maintain the premises to an acceptable standard. This contributes to low morale among staff and a lack of confidence in the proprietor's values and strategic vision for the school.
- The proprietor does not manage the recruitment of new staff effectively. Staff turnover continues to be high. This has a negative impact on pupils with autism, who benefit from continuity in their relationships with staff. This also places extra demands on staff, who are required to support and train new colleagues as they settle in.
- Leaders have failed to ensure that safeguarding procedures are followed promptly and consistently. As a result, the independent school standards, including those related to the arrangements for safeguarding pupils, are not met in full. There is a need to strengthen staff knowledge of the requirements in part 4 and to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to support rigorous maintenance of the single central record. Leaders' oversight of the single central record has not identified lapses, including some which have persisted over time.
- The standards in this paragraph are not met.
- Overall, 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	116593
DfE registration number	838/6033
Inspection number	10302856

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 residential special school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	4
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cambian Autism Services Ltd
Chair	Farouq Sheikh
Headteacher	Daniel Pitt
Annual fees (day pupils)	£95,172
Telephone number	01258 860295
Website	<a href="https://www.cambiagroup.com/specialist-education/our-schools/autism-schools/the-forum-school/">https://www.cambiagroup.com/specialist-education/our-schools/autism-schools/the-forum-school/</a>
Email address	forum.admin@cambiagroup.com
Date of previous standard inspection	9 to 11 November 2022

## Information about this school

- The school's previous standard inspection took place in November 2022. The school was judged to require improvement.
- The residential provision was inspected in May 2023 and judged to require improvement.

- The Forum School is part of the Cambian Group, a national provider of independent specialist education.
- The school caters for pupils with autism. All pupils have education, health and care plans. A significant proportion of pupils at the school are non-verbal, or semi-verbal due to their complex needs.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- This emergency inspection was carried out at the commission of the Department for Education in response to a serious complaint relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils and leadership and management. The inspection was conducted with no notice.
- The inspector checked the school's compliance with some independent school standards relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils, the suitability of staff, the premises and accommodation, and leadership and management.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, the head of education and a regional representative of the proprietor. The inspector also held discussions with staff.
- The inspector spoke with groups of pupils. However, she was not able to speak with pupils unaccompanied by staff.
- A range of documentation was considered, including policies, the school's action plan, risk assessments, records of safeguarding and behaviour incidents, and minutes from governance meetings. The inspector took into account records held by Dorset local authority.

## Inspection team

Lydia Pride, 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.

### **Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors**

- 21(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor keeps a register which shows such of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question.
- 21(3) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is–
  - 21(3)(a) in relation to each member of staff ("S") appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether–
    - 21(3)(a)(i) S's identity was checked
    - 21(3)(a)(ii) a check was made to establish whether S is barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the 2006 Act
    - 21(3)(a)(iii) a check was made to establish whether S is subject to any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in such a direction
    - 21(3)(a)(iv) checks were made to ensure, where appropriate, that S had the relevant qualifications
    - 21(3)(a)(v) an enhanced criminal record certificate was obtained in respect of S
    - 21(3)(a)(vi) checks were made pursuant to paragraph 18(2)(d)
    - 21(3)(a)(vii) a check of S's right to work in the United Kingdom was made; and
    - 21(3)(a)(viii) checks were made pursuant to paragraph 18(2)(e)
  - 21(3)(b) in relation to each member of staff ("S"), whether a check was made to establish whether S is subject to a prohibition order or an interim prohibition order, including the date on which such check was completed.

### **Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools**

- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

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

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