

Belong School Devon

138 Cowick Street, Exeter, Devon EX4 1HS

Inspection date

12 June 2024

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material changes relating to the school provision are implemented

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b)

- The proprietor ensures that safeguarding is appropriately prioritised. The school has a comprehensive, up-to-date safeguarding policy which is published on the school's website. The policy covers all elements of the latest statutory guidance. Key personnel are highlighted, including their contact details, so that staff and parents have easy access to approach safeguarding leads should they have concerns. This reflects the open and welcoming culture of the school. The policy has detailed information about what is expected of staff in terms of protecting pupils.
- The school has ensured that the leadership of safeguarding is robust. Staff receive regular and ongoing training, including those in leadership positions. An established safeguarding team, including a passionate and skilled designated safeguarding lead, oversees the pastoral provision for pupils. It ensures that pupils' needs are identified early and met. Staff know what is expected of them and how to record concerns. Strong working relationships are managed on an ongoing basis with other agencies. As a result, staff work together collaboratively to implement the school's policies and practices effectively.

Paragraphs 11 and 12

- The school has established health and safety policies and procedures. Staff work together diligently to ensure the school is a safe place to be, where health and safety is taken seriously. They apply the school's health and safety policies with precision.
- The current school buildings comply fully with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Fire signs, exits and extinguishers are clearly indicated and suitably located throughout the school's existing buildings. The proprietor ensures that the school's fire safety arrangements are checked regularly by appropriately qualified staff or professionals. Leaders make sure that recommended actions are addressed swiftly.
- As a former nursery, the proposed new site has similar fire safety resources available. For example, there are plentiful smoke detectors and call points. Rooms benefit from fire doors. There are appropriate fire extinguishers set around the premises. This,

combined with the already effective systems utilised by leaders, means policy and procedure are well placed to be adapted should the material change be granted.

Paragraph 14

- The school ensures that levels of supervision are high. Typically, pupils learn in small groups, and often one to one, according to the requirements of their education, health and care plans. This means they are well supervised during formal lessons and at less formal times of the day. Leaders have ensured appropriate consideration has been given to ensure staffing levels remain at the expected ratios should the number of pupils on roll increase.

Paragraphs 16 to 16(b)

- The school's risk assessment policy is secure. It provides a clear framework for staff to evaluate potential hazards, including across the school site. Risk assessments are routinely completed as part of school life to ensure pupils' safety. Where risks are identified, mitigations are put in place. There are sound assessments already developed for the proposed new site. The proprietor has ensured the school is likely to continue meeting the independent school standards relating to part 3 checked on this inspection should the material change be granted.

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

Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3) to 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3) to 21(3)(b), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(4), 21(5) to 21(6), 21(7)(a) to 21(7)(b)

- The proprietor ensures that staff, volunteers and those in governance positions are safe to work with children and young people. Safer recruitment processes are robust and followed in full. Leaders ensure that appropriate checks are made on new staff and that these are recorded carefully on a single central record. Plans to expand the size of the school team have been considered in a systematic way. As a result, the proprietor has ensured that all elements of part 4 are likely to remain met if the material change is granted.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 22, 23(1)(a) to 23(2), 24(1) to 24(3), 25, 26, 27(a) to 27(b), 28(1) to 28(2)(b), 29(1) to 29(2), 31(a) to 31(c)

- The Belong School Devon is currently situated on one of the main roads within the centre of Exeter. It has been appropriately furnished to allow for the alternative curriculum on offer to pupils. The site is well maintained. The proprietor has ensured that the site meets health and safety requirements, including those relating to fire safety, while also mitigating the risks posed by individual pupil's needs. Established processes are in place to check and maintain the buildings to the required standard.
- The proposed new site is located within a large industrial estate to the south of Exeter. The site benefits from three distinct outside areas. They provide the opportunity for the school to develop a spacious car park, a turning circle for pupils' transport and a large outdoor area where pupils can socialise, play and receive

physical education lessons. All three spaces have appropriate outdoor, including emergency, lighting.

- The buildings at the proposed new site are large and are in sound condition. The accommodation is comprised of varied spaces, some large and others smaller, across two floors. The proprietor's plans to refurbish and reorganise the current buildings are well conceived. For example, leaders plan to utilise the larger classrooms to provide a mix of spacious, often purpose-built, areas for subject-specific learning such as science, art and media studies. Smaller rooms will be utilised as work bases. This will allow provision to continue to offer personalised spaces for learning, as in the school's current curriculum model. All rooms have non-flicker lighting and plentiful windows. They are light and airy, with appropriate acoustics for learning.
- The site benefits from plenty of toilets on both floors. Leaders plan to refurbish these to make them suitable for the age of their pupils. Toilets will have mixer taps, ensuring that hot water will not pose a scalding risk. There will be separate boys' and girls' toilets, as well as gender-neutral toilets, for the sole use of pupils. Separate staff toilets will be located on both floors. The gender-specific toilets will have showers and space for pupils to change. There is an accessible toilet downstairs. There will be assigned access to drinking-water, which will be labelled as such.
- Leaders plan to adapt a room on the first floor to be the medical room. The space will be solely used for first aid, medical examination and for the short-term care of sick or injured pupils. The room will benefit from a sink and is near toilets. It is also planned to be adjacent to a lockable room which will be used to store medication.
- The proprietor's plans and current systems and processes show that it is well placed to ensure the independent school standards in part 5 are likely to remain met if the material changes are granted.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34

- Leaders' plans and rationale for the material change is well considered and robust. The proprietor works closely and collaboratively with the local authority to ensure provision helps meet local need. This has led to the exploration of an improved site to allow the school to strengthen its curriculum offer, as well as meet the increase in demand identified by the local authority. From this, leaders have developed detailed plans to manage the development of the newly identified site, consider the transition from one site to another and ensure that these plans do not diminish the strength of provision currently on offer.
- There is compelling evidence that the proprietor will ensure that part 8 of the independent school standards will remain met if the material change is granted.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that are relevant to the material change.

School details

Unique reference number	147471
DfE registration number	878/6082
Inspection number	10338321

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Belong Learning CiC
Chair	James Evans
Headteacher	Mrs Roz Harman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£39,000
Telephone number	03003035755
Website	www.belonglearning.co.uk
Email address	info@belonglearning.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	23 to 25 May 2023

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	11 to 17	11 to 17	11 to 17
Number of pupils on the school roll	48	75	75

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	50	75
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	50	75
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	50	75
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	50	75

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	11	14
Number of part-time teaching staff	2	1
Number of staff in the welfare provision	16	27

Information about this school

- Belong School Devon was registered by the Department for Education in November 2019. It is an independent special school in Exeter.
- The school's last standard inspection took place in May 2023, when it was judged to be good, with all independent school standards met.
- The school is a specialist provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have education, health and care plans. Pupils are placed at the school by their representative local authorities. Most pupils are placed by Devon County Council.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education in response to the proprietor's request to change premises and increase the pupil capacity from 50 to 75. This was the second material change inspection since the school's registration.
- During the inspection, the inspector met with the headteacher, the assistant headteacher, who is also the designated safeguarding lead, and the chief executive officer of Belong Learning CiC.
- The inspector toured the current school site, as well as the proposed new site at Gilbert House, Grace Road West, Marsh Barton, Exeter, EX2 8PU with leaders. During both tours, the inspector reviewed current provision and discussed leaders' plans to develop the proposed new site. He considered the suitability and safety of the proposed new accommodation, as well as the feasibility of this allowing an increase in pupil numbers.
- The inspector reviewed and evaluated documents provided by the school, including risk assessments, policies, the single central record and safeguarding information.

Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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