

The Outdoors School

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

Inspection date

4 October 2024

Overall outcome

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

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7 (b) and 32(1)(c)

- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in Part 3 checked on this inspection are likely to be met if the material change is agreed. The plan is to utilise three of the four sites to allow them to respond to an increase in demand for places from the main admitting local authority. This means current policies and procedures are already in place and will only need minor amendment to facilitate the planned growth. This includes policies relating to health and safety, pupils' welfare and safeguarding.
- The school has a comprehensive, up-to-date safeguarding policy, published on the school's website. The policy is underpinned by the latest statutory guidance, including Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024. The policy starts by highlighting key personnel and their contacts, so that staff and parents know who to go to if they have concerns. The policy also makes clear what is expected of staff should they have concerns about pupils' safety or well-being. The proprietor ensures the policy is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the ongoing needs of pupils at the school.
- The leadership of safeguarding has been considered carefully to reflect a multi-site school. A safeguarding team oversees safeguarding across all settings. They have relevant safeguarding experience which is utilised to work effectively with families and other agencies. Each site has a dedicated deputy designated safeguarding lead as well as lead tutors who have been trained to the appropriate level. This safeguarding team oversee the pastoral provision for pupils effectively. They ensure an ongoing overview of how effectively pupils' needs are met. Leaders have considered the extra capacity needed should more pupils be admitted. As such, safeguarding policy and processes are well set to cope should the material change be granted.

Paragraphs 11 and 12

- The proprietor has an established health and safety policy. The policy is written and implemented by a dedicated health and safety officer. The health and safety officer has oversight of all four sites that make up the school. Staff work collaboratively and diligently to ensure the policy is implemented in full. This includes undertaking regular

and ongoing checks on the site, fire safety, the condition of the buildings, woodland and so on.

- The school buildings and estate currently 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 buildings and outdoor learning spaces. Leaders have considered the implications of growth on fire evacuation procedures. Policy and procedure are well placed to adapt should the material change be granted.

Paragraphs 14 and 16

- The school's health and safety policy details the expectations for writing and reviewing risk assessments. Due to the nature of provision, risk is considered on a daily, weekly and ongoing basis. Staff continually review and update assessments to evaluate and mitigate potential hazards. This includes the assessment of safety for each school site, off-site trips and daily routines such as the taxi pick up and drop off. Pupils benefit from individual risk assessments that are routinely reviewed and updated to ensure pupils' safety. Leaders recognise that all risk assessments will need to be revisited should more groups be established.
- The school ensures that pupils are appropriately supervised. A lead tutor and appropriately trained support staff oversee individual groups of eight pupils. Those in leadership positions provide ongoing supervision and support when needed. The model is consistently applied across all sites. As such, leaders have already worked out precisely the number of staff needed to maintain supervision levels if the material change is agreed.

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 (4), 21(5) to 21(6), 21(7)(a) to 21(7)(b)

- The school benefits from effective safer recruitment practices. The proprietor has an established human resources team. They ensure appropriate checks are made on all new staff and these checks are recorded diligently on a single central register. Leaders intend to use the same robust systems to check the suitability of staff appointed as the school grows. As such, Part 4 of the independent school standards 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 proprietor has secure plans to ensure that Part 5 of the independent school standards are likely to remain met if the material change is granted. The school benefits from four sites. Each site has the same purpose-built facilities to allow for the organisation of provision in small groups of eight pupils. The recently acquired site in Crediton has allowed leaders to give pupils a more formalised curriculum, as they move into key stage 4. Each site has suitable toilet and washing facilities for the sole

use of pupils. No water presents a scalding risk. Each site has its own medical room, which have their own sinks and are near a toilet.

- Pupils typically learn in outdoor woodland areas. These areas benefit from 'learning bases', which are purpose-built classrooms for pupils to learn the more formal parts of the curriculum. Classrooms are light, airy and have appropriate acoustic conditions. The school has already prepared for the groups they are planning to establish on three of the sites by building new 'learning bases' in freshly designated areas. These have been completed to a high standard, as is the case for the buildings used on each site of the school. All buildings are appropriately maintained by the estates team from the proprietor group.
- The school's settings benefit from extensive outdoor areas, which are appropriately fenced and managed. As such, pupils have plentiful opportunities to enjoy play and learn outside. Each setting has access to showers and single sex changing rooms. Therefore, standards in Part 5 are likely to remain met should the material change be granted.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34

- Leaders' rationale for the material change is based on an authentic ambition to do the best for pupils who have additional needs. They understand and are planning to meet local need in collaboration with the main admitting local authority. Leaders have developed detailed plans to manage the development of the school sites and mitigate against any risk of negative impact on current provision. For example, they have restructured how leaders oversee each group of pupils and created new management roles to give extra capacity should the school grow. There is compelling evidence that the proprietor will ensure that Part 8 of the ISSs 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	146200
DfE registration number	878/6075
Inspection number	10367020

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	The Outdoors Group Ltd
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 standard inspection	18 to 20 October 2022

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	7 to 16	7 to 16	7 to 16
Number of pupils on the school roll	81	120	120

Pupils

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

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	81	120
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	81	120
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	81	120
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	81	120

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	40	46
Number of part-time teaching staff	0	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	60	72

Information about this school

- The Outdoors School was registered by the Department for Education in July 2019. It is an independent special school in Devon. The school admits pupils from the age of seven to 16 years. The current capacity of the school is 90.
- The school's last standard inspection took place in October 2022, when it was judged to be good, with all independent school standards met. Since that inspection, the school has added another site to its provision. This means the school is now located across four 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
 - Western Lodge, Western Road, Crediton, Devon EX17 3NH.

- The school is a specialist provision for pupils with autism spectrum disorder and 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, which for most pupils is 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 increase the capacity of the school from 90 to 120. This was the third material change to the school's registration since opening. The first material change took place in October 2020. The second was in August 2021.
- During the inspection, the inspector met with several operational leads at the school including the executive headteacher and executive deputy headteacher and the designated safeguarding lead.
- The inspector toured the Credenhill site, which is the newly acquired fourth site, and the main school site with leaders to check the suitability and safety of their plans to increase the maximum number of pupils the school is asking to provide for.
- 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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