

Inspection of The Stable School

12 Dudmoor Farm Road, Christchurch, Dorset BH23 6AQ

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Recently, the school has been through an unsettling time. Several things have changed, including the school's owners, leaders and some staff. New leaders have introduced positive changes. They have raised expectations of pupils' academic learning and how they should behave. However, they understand there is much more to do to improve the school.

Most pupils have faced considerable disruption to their education before joining the school. Staff make it a priority to understand pupils' complex needs when they first start. They develop warm and nurturing relationships. This helps pupils settle and positively impacts their learning and safety.

The majority of pupils rise to the higher expectations of how to behave. A few are taking a little longer to follow suit. Most pupils understand the need to be in the 'right place' doing the 'right thing' in the 'right way'. Incidents of poor behaviour have decreased markedly. This makes the school calmer and more settled than in the past.

Parents hold mixed views about the school. Some comment favourably on how their children are more confident and on a better pathway to academic success. Others, however, are not convinced by the recent changes.

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

Senior leaders provide a clear sense of direction. They are working on the right things to bring about sustainable improvement. A broad curriculum is in place. Some areas are further developed than others. For example, the English and mathematics curriculums in key stage 4 identify what pupils need to learn and when. Teachers know the subject content well. Most pupils in this phase of education gain a range of GCSE and functional skills qualifications. This gives pupils a sense of achievement.

In other phases and subjects, notably at key stage 3, the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn and build on is less well developed. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough. Furthermore, some staff do not have the expertise to implement the curriculum as the school intends. This limits the progress through the curriculum that some groups of pupils make.

The culture of reading is not fully effective. At key stage 4, pupils listen to others read and take part in meaningful discussions around texts. However, across other phases, some reading sessions are not as purposeful. Often, there is insufficient focus on helping pupils develop positive reading habits.

All pupils have an education, health and care plan (ECH plan). The school checks on pupils' starting points when they join the school. They accurately identify pupils' needs. Staff are becoming skilled at using targets from pupils' ECH plans in the content they teach.

Typically, pupils are productive in lessons. They enjoy the new points system, which rewards them for making the right choices. Lost learning time has reduced because the expectations of pupils are higher than before. Specialist staff provide effective pastoral support for pupils who have previously experienced trauma.

Many pupils arrive at school with a history of poor attendance. A minority of pupils still do not attend school often enough. They miss a substantial part of their education. The school has increased its focus on improving pupils' attendance. It follows up on absences quickly and checks that pupils are safe when not at school. The school recognises that this continues to be a top priority.

Pupils' personal development is threaded through assemblies and the wider curriculum. Pupils are taught how to look after their mental health. They use strategies such as going for a walk or speaking with a trusted adult. Visits from the police help educate pupils about the acceptable use of social media, consent and harmful sexualised behaviour. Cases of derogatory language are reducing because pupils learn to respect diversity and difference. However, pupils would like to have a stronger voice in how the school runs, for example, through charitable work and organising events. Presently, they have limited opportunities to take on responsibilities.

Careers education is increasingly effective. Older pupils plan for work experience. They visit a range of post-16 provisions as they start to prepare for the next stage of education.

Some parents are unhappy about the recent changes. For example, they raise concerns about communication and how the school takes on board feedback. The school has work to do to restore some parents' confidence in its work.

Staff want the best for every pupil. The overwhelming majority of staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire said they were proud to work at the school.

The proprietor body has a positive background in setting up and leading specialist schools. Along with senior leaders, it is working resolutely to improve the school. It has identified what needs to be better. A robust cycle of monitoring is in place. This assures the proprietor body of the quality of provision and compliance with the independent school standards. It is well placed to continue the school's journey of improvement. The school fully meets the standards and the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some staff do not have the expertise to implement the curriculum as intended. Occasionally, expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. As a result, this limits the progress some groups of pupils make. The school and proprietor should ensure that:
 - staff deepen their knowledge of subject-specific pedagogy, so that the curriculum is closely matched to pupils' individual needs
 - expectations of what pupils can achieve are consistently high.
- The school has not fully developed an effective reading curriculum. Some groups of pupils do not read widely or enjoy reading. The school should seek ways to create a culture of reading across all school phases.
- A minority of pupils have poor attendance. They miss a substantial part of their education. The school should take further action to work with families and external agencies to increase the attendance of pupils who frequently miss school.
- Pupils do not have an extensive range of opportunities to contribute positively to their school and wider community. This limits the chance for pupils to understand how to be responsible and active citizens. The school should provide meaningful experiences for pupils to broaden their horizons and help them to become responsible and active members of society.
- Some parents raise concerns about various aspects of the school's work. For example, they do not feel informed about the recent changes that have taken place. The school, including the proprietor, should take action to improve communication with parents who have concerns, so they have greater confidence in the improvements they are making.

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	147198
DfE registration number	839/6012
Local authority	Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole
Inspection number	10308903
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	6 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Number of part-time pupils	7
Proprietor	The Happy Learning Centre Ltd
Chair	Tracey Storey
Principal	John Shanahan (Interim Principal)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£42,980
Telephone number	01202 116274
Website	www.thestableschool.com
Email address	john.shanahan@thestableschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	10 to 12 March 2020

Information about this school

- The Stable School is an independent special school. It caters for pupils with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These include social, emotional and mental health needs and autism spectrum disorders. All pupils who attend the school have an ECH plan funded by four local authorities.
- The school is registered for 65 pupils between the ages of six and 16 years. Currently, there are no pupils in key stage 1.
- The school operates on two sites that are one mile apart.
- Significant changes have been made to the school. The school changed ownership in April 2023. The headteacher and several other staff left the school in July 2023. A full-time interim principal took up post in September 2023.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider.

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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the interim principal, director of education, senior leaders and a range of staff to discuss aspects of the school's work. The lead inspector held a telephone call with the chair of the proprietor body and a representative from the local authority safeguarding team.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English (including early reading), mathematics and personal, social, emotional and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, 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.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first. Inspectors considered how well safeguarding leaders act on concerns about pupils' welfare and safety. Inspectors talked to staff about the school's safeguarding practice.

- 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, risk assessments, record-keeping for behaviour management, attendance and supervision during social times.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and responses to the staff and pupil survey. Inspectors reviewed email correspondence received from parents.

Inspection team

Dale Burr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Rachel Hesketh

His Majesty's Inspector

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