

Running Deer

Butterdon Wood, Willingstone, Moretonhampstead, Devon TQ13 8PY

Inspection dates

2 to 4 July 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The effectiveness of leadership and management are good. Leaders, including directors, have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- School leaders have successfully overcome the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. As a result, the quality of care and education that pupils receive is good.
- The head of school and education manager work together extremely well. Their drive and determination to provide the very best care and education for pupils shines through all aspects of the school.
- Teaching is good. Staff are highly skilled and passionate in their work. They provide pupils with high-quality learning experiences which enable them to learn effectively and make strong progress.
- The quality of the therapeutic provision for pupils is instrumental to the success of this school. This work is making a significant and positive difference to pupils' emotional health and well-being.
- Staff are vigilant in their approach to the welfare of each pupil and safeguard them effectively.
- Leaders plan a personalised timetable to meet pupils' individual needs. There is a strong focus on English, mathematics and science. However, the range of GCSE subjects available for pupils to access is limited.
- The curriculum is evolving. Leaders have identified that, as the needs of pupils change, the curriculum needs to reflect these changes to ensure it continues to meet their needs.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are impressive, allowing pupils to build high levels of trust with adults. However, as yet, pupils, and especially the most able, do not recognise their academic ability. This prevents them from reaching their full potential.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils have a clear understanding of what is right and wrong. They are kind, caring and considerate to each other.
- Pupils talk positively about their school. They enjoy all that the school has to offer. This is reflected in their regular attendance.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of care and education their child receives.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School standards) Regulations 2014 (the independent school standards) and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the curriculum to better meet the on-going needs of pupils and prepare them well for their futures.
- Further extend the suite of academic qualifications available for pupils.
- Continue the work to raise pupils' self-belief in their own ability, especially the most able, in order that they fulfil their full academic potential.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, including directors, have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- 'Awesome' and 'inspirational' were just two of the many positive comments used by staff to describe the leadership of the school. Together, the head of school and education manager work tirelessly to provide pupils with high-quality care and an effective education.
- The school's self-evaluation of its own performance is honest. Leaders, including directors, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The three-year strategic plan carefully considers the actions required to further improve the quality of education provided for pupils. For example, leaders have accurately identified that pupils need the opportunity to study GCSE subjects beyond the core subjects of mathematics, English and science.
- Staff welcome the high-quality professional development they receive to improve and develop their practice. As a result, the quality of teaching over time is good.
- Leaders ensure that each pupil benefits from a carefully planned personalised learning programme to meet their complex needs. The school's approach to providing the correct balance of therapy, care and education enables pupils to achieve well and make good progress.
- Pupils have access to a broad range of subjects. There is a strong focus on developing key skills in reading, writing and mathematics alongside well-considered therapeutic provision which includes equine, bush craft and play therapy. Staff work tirelessly to ensure that pupils are well prepared for their future destinations.
- Pupils have the opportunity to engage in an exciting and diverse range of enrichment activities, for example horse-riding and climbing. Pupils spoke eloquently with the inspector about the impact of these experiences on their lives, for example reducing their anxious behaviours, providing valuable life skills and equipping them well for their future.
- Personal, social and health education is fundamental to pupils' holistic development at this school. The introduction of the emotional curriculum has played a crucial role in pupils learning to trust adults, learn about themselves and form positive relationships with adults and each other. For example, base camp is a place where pupils and staff can socialise together, talk and have fun. This work reduces pupils' significant anxiety and promotes pupils' well-being.
- Leaders plan skilfully for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They carefully and sensitively design activities to meet the needs of pupils. For example, visits from Exeter Cultural Champions enhance pupils' understanding of different faiths and cultures, for example Hinduism.
- Pupils have a growing awareness of what it means to live in modern Britain. They understand democracy, respect and equality. This understanding is because they are taught well and provided with a range of opportunities from which to learn. For example, pupils talk with knowledge about the impact of the 'No Outsiders' curriculum, and the

importance of treating everyone with respect and dignity whatever their background. As a result, pupils are able to debate on a wide range of issues, such as democracy, rule of law and equality, and this develops their knowledge and understanding of the wider world.

- Parents who were spoken with or who sent in text messages and emails are overwhelmingly positive about the school. 'If my child had not gone to Running Deer, I don't know where we would be', 'truly amazing' and 'this is a truly exceptional school' are just three of the many plaudits provided to the inspector.

Governance

- Directors, two of whom are employed in the school, work closely with senior leaders to ensure that the needs of each pupil are met well. Directors demonstrate a good range of skills and expertise. They provide strong support and challenge to leaders. They do not rely solely on information provided by the leaders but gather first-hand evidence for themselves through visits and conversations with staff and pupils. Minutes of directors' meetings, viewed during the inspection, demonstrate how directors ask searching questions of leaders about all aspects of the care and education they are providing for pupils.
- Directors understand the importance of safer recruitment. All checks are undertaken carefully to ensure that appointed staff are appropriate to work with these vulnerable pupils. The director responsible for safeguarding checks that the single central record is accurate and well maintained to ensure that it continues to meet statutory requirements.
- Finances are checked closely and monitored to ensure the financial stability of the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff receive high-quality training on all aspects of safeguarding, which includes child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism. This training ensures that staff are confident in the actions to take should they have any concerns about a pupil.
- Leaders have ensured that there is an up-to-date safeguarding policy which reflects accurately the government's current legislation and guidance. This policy is easily accessible on the school's website for parents and carers.
- Leaders check to ensure that staff read, understand and adhere to all policies related to safeguarding. These checks ensure that staff are knowledgeable on how to minimise risk and keep pupils safe.
- Staff and directors have a good understanding of the need to protect these vulnerable pupils from all possible risks. Record-keeping is systematic and detailed. Records demonstrate clearly how actions taken have reduced risk to pupils.
- Leaders take all reasonable precautions to ensure that pupils are safe around the school site. Risk assessments are detailed and monitored carefully to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and minimise the risk to individual pupils.
- Leaders, including the directors, understand the importance of recruiting safely. This means that staff are checked appropriately to ensure that they are safe to work with children prior to starting in post. This minimises the risk to pupils and helps keep them safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Good teaching is supported by teachers' deep knowledge and understanding of the complex needs of each pupil. Teachers use this knowledge to plan learning that meets the emotional and academic needs of pupils effectively.
- Staff build highly effective and trusting relationships with pupils. This high level of trust is crucial in enabling pupils to access learning.
- Staff provide a safe and nurturing environment for pupils. This environment enables pupils to develop and flourish, increasing their belief that they can become successful learners.
- Staff provide activities which motivate pupils to learn. Staff are adept in combining classroom learning with the effective use of the expansive woodland area afforded to them. This combination of indoor and outdoor learning is pivotal to pupils' strong progress, but especially in improving their emotional and mental health.
- Staff are skilful in questioning. They use their strong subject knowledge to adapt and modify their questioning to check pupils' understanding and make them think carefully.
- Typically, pupils are encouraged to work hard and produce work of a high standard. When needed, staff gently cajole pupils to persevere and complete their work. However, staff do not consistently challenge pupils well enough to enable them to achieve their full potential, especially the most able pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- All staff, irrespective of their role, receive high-quality training to recognise signs of harm and abuse. They are diligent and act quickly to deal with any concerns. Morning briefings at the start of the day ensure that valuable information is shared, alerting them to any potential issue which may need a watchful eye. Staff also welcome the end of day briefings which enable them to discuss any concerns or anxieties they may have.
- Pupils settle quickly into school life as a result of the consistent approach to learning and high-quality therapeutic activities. Over time, pupils are able to take better care of themselves and gain a better understanding of the risks they may be susceptible to. For example, pupils who spoke with the inspector were articulate in explaining sexting and the importance of keeping themselves safe when using social media.
- Pupils typically demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. They want to do well. However, there are still occasions where they lack the belief that they can achieve. This lack of self-worth has a detrimental impact and prevents some pupils from achieving their full academic potential.
- Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their regular attendance. Pupils comment on how Running Deer is 'a special place', and how 'the school fits my education around my needs rather than me having to fit the education'. The description of the school by another pupil, who said, 'It is amazing,' exemplified the wider views of pupils in the

school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils who attend the school have a number of complex needs. Consequently, most pupils have significant difficulties in managing their own feelings and behaviour. Through the excellent support and guidance they receive from staff, and the therapeutic interventions they receive, they quickly learn how to better manage their emotions and regulate their behaviour.
- Every pupil has a bespoke plan. These plans are detailed and linked closely to pupils' education, health and care plans. Behaviour plans and risk assessments are comprehensive. Leaders and staff know precisely the triggers which increase pupils' anxieties and which can lead to their challenging behaviours. Nevertheless, as a result of the school's successful approach to pupils' personal development and welfare, the need for physical intervention is rare. Indeed, pupils told the inspector that they can barely remember the last time physical intervention by staff was required.
- Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the behaviours not tolerated at school. For example, they know that physical aggression, racist and homophobic behaviours, and being hurtful and unkind are unacceptable. Pupils are knowledgeable about the sanctions imposed for poor behaviour, but they also welcome the rewards for positive behaviours, which they can select for themselves.
- Staff model kindness, consideration and courtesy. As a result, pupils learn from adults about how to behave. Pupils are considerate of the feelings of others and learn how to accept that, while they are all different, they have a right to be treated equally.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils who attend Running Deer School have experienced significant trauma in their lives. Many of the pupils have been out of education for long periods of time. As a result, on arrival to the school, pupils' attainment is often well below that expected for their age, especially in reading, writing and mathematics.
- A close look at pupils' work and other documentation during the inspection shows that, since arriving at the school, pupils make strong progress, most notably in their emotional and mental health. Good teaching, combined with effective therapeutic provision, is supporting pupils to overcome the many challenges they face. Typically, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning and want to do well. This significant turnaround in pupils' attitudes is down to the care, perseverance and resilience of staff.
- Pupils are typically provided with activities that meet their emotional and academic needs well. For example, art provides both therapeutic benefits and the opportunity for pupils to excel in a chosen subject. Such provision reduces pupils' anxiety and increases their self-belief. However, there is an acknowledgement by leaders that, as yet, pupils, especially the most able, do not have the belief that they have the ability to be successful, especially in their academic studies. This doubt is hampering the academic achievement of pupils.
- There is a strong focus on developing pupils' skills in the core areas of reading, writing, mathematics and science. Typically, pupils make good progress in these areas. For

example, in English, pupils read with confidence and accuracy. They were able to use the text to extrapolate the required information to answer GCSE questions successfully.

- Pupils make good progress in their mathematics. They are able to demonstrate their fluency in a range of mathematical concepts and complete calculations and solve problems. For example, older pupils were able to solve algebraic equations with high levels of success. Pupils are able to apply their mathematical knowledge to practical activities. For example, using their knowledge of angles when building a roof to their den to ensure rain water runs away.
- Pupils are provided with opportunities to write across all the subjects they access. There is evidence that they are able to write at length, demonstrating their understanding of grammar and increasingly varied vocabulary choices. For example, pupils apply their writing skills in chosen research projects, for example on sea mammals.
- Key stage 4 pupils are working hard to achieve their GCSEs in English, mathematics and science. Access to GCSEs, alongside other awards, is increasing pupils' self-esteem and motivation to become successful learners. As a result, pupils have high aspirations and are better prepared for their future education, training or employment.
- Careers guidance is well considered. The hard work and persistence of staff to find the best places for pupils to transfer, allows them to follow their aspirations. As a result, pupils who leave the school are successful in securing a place in further education, training or employment.

School details

Unique reference number	143539
DfE registration number	878/6067
Inspection number	10090669

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 category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	7
Number of part-time pupils	3
Proprietor	Running Deer CIC
Chair	Peter Vickery
Head of School	Joanna Winterburn
Annual fees (day pupils)	£58,000
Telephone number	01647 400 201
Website	www.runningdeerschool.org.uk
Email address	info@runningdeer.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 to 21 September 2017

Information about this school

- Running Deer School is situated in a large area of woodland approximately two miles north of Moretonhampstead. There are two classrooms.
- The school is operated by Running Deer Community Interest Company. The managing director also fulfils the role of head of school. Since the last standard inspection, an education manager has been recruited.
- The school accommodates pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school specialises in working with pupils who have learning, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, including Autism, Asperger Syndrome, Oppositional Defiance

Disorder and mental health issues.

- Through the teaching of practical skills and therapeutic education, the school aims to enable pupils to overcome barriers to learning. For example, activities are designed to stimulate and challenge pupils, supporting their personal development and improving confidence, self-esteem, communication skills, and their social and emotional well-being.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed both indoor and outdoor learning. These observations were conducted jointly with the head of school and education manager
- The quality of pupils' written work and pictorial records of their learning were viewed by the inspector.
- Meetings were held with the head of school, the education manager, staff and directors. The inspector took account of the views in the 13 completed staff questionnaires. A telephone conversation was held with a medical clinician who works closely with the school.
- The views of pupils were gathered informally during the inspection and the inspector considered seven responses to the pupils' survey.
- A wide range of documentation was examined, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, the school's three-year strategic plan, and information relating to pupils' achievement and progress. Records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding were also scrutinised.
- The eight responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and seven text messages were taken into account. Emails received by the school from parents were also considered. The inspector held telephone conversations with three parents.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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