

Inspection of CMAS School Devon

Wonford Community and Learning Centre, Burnthouse Lane, Exeter, Devon EX2 6NF

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 July 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

At each of the school's three sites, pupils are keen to attend. Pupils and staff share positive relationships and the environment is welcoming and inclusive. Pupils are happy and can express themselves. They respect one another and help each other out willingly. Pupils behave well in lessons and feel safe. Most say that there is no bullying and that staff would deal with this well, if it should ever occur.

Nevertheless, the quality of education is not good enough. Staff have expectations of what pupils can achieve academically that are too low. This means that too many subjects are not taught consistently well and so pupils do not gain the knowledge they need to be well prepared for their next steps.

The well-being curriculum, which develops pupils' personal and social skills, is instrumental in pupils returning to education successfully. This is often after long spells of not attending a school. Through this curriculum, pupils benefit from appropriate careers advice that takes their different interests into account.

Staff are wholly committed to the pupils they support. Pupils and parents and carers say that it is making a real change in their lives. Several parents remarked that the school has been a 'lifesaver' for their child.

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

Pupils do not benefit from a sufficiently well-crafted academic curriculum. Curriculum plans for academic subjects, including English and physical education (PE), are not strong. The schemes of work for most subjects do not give enough thought to how pupils will remember what they have been taught. Pupils read well. There are opportunities in the curriculum for them to study texts and develop their writing and speaking.

Leaders have not checked on the quality of the curriculum plans or how well they are implemented. Too often, teaching does not give enough consideration to meeting pupils' special educational needs well. Some teachers have updated their plans very recently. These set out greater detail of the content to be covered.

The well-being curriculum has been carefully constructed. It is successful in helping pupils to manage, and often overcome, difficult times in their past. As a result of this curriculum and the support from staff, the majority of pupils settle in quickly. They swiftly regain their self-confidence and self-esteem. As a result, they are ready to move on with their learning.

The well-being curriculum also supports pupils to develop their identity, including exploring different religious beliefs and cultures. Pupils demonstrate a healthy interest in learning about others.

However, too often, teachers and mentors do not build on pupils' new-found confidence. They do not challenge pupils enough in their academic studies or in developing their independence. Pupils' work is often incomplete, and few staff members expect pupils to catch up on work they have missed. Many staff members are too quick to lower their expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly academically.

The proprietor and leaders recognised many of the weaknesses of the school earlier in the academic year. Through what they call '100 days of change', they reflected on these weaknesses and set about planning to move forward. This included reallocating staff members to roles to which they were better suited and appointing additional leaders and teachers. These are beginning to lead to improvements and greater capacity to monitor the school's work.

However, the monitoring systems that are in place lack rigour. Leaders cannot therefore assure themselves that records are accurate and complete. For example, in the admissions register and attendance register, there is missing and incorrect information. Consequently, the proprietor has not ensured that the independent school standards are met. However, these do not have a serious impact on pupils' welfare or personal development.

Leaders work closely with local authorities to provide much-needed provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Staff are particularly effective in re-engaging pupils with school life and developing their personal and social skills. However, the quality of information they provide to local authorities is not as strong as it could be.

The proprietor has ensured that the premises are maintained well. An accessibility plan is in place and the school complies with Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Staff are proud to work at the school and most enjoy working here. Most feel supported by leaders, although some comment on poor communication: they are not always clear about what is going on or why. Almost half of the staff who responded to Ofsted's survey commented that their workload is too heavy, and they struggle to complete their work in the time allocated. Leaders have recognised this and allocated additional time to staff from September 2021.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

An up-to-date safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

Staff members know pupils and their families well. They are vigilant when they recognise changes in pupils' moods or behaviours and work well to get to the bottom of it. Where there are more significant concerns, leaders work well with different agencies, including the local authority, to ensure that pupils are protected and kept safe.

The school curriculum is particularly effective in teaching pupils about the risks they face online and in person. Pupils were very knowledgeable about abusive relationships, and their own physical, sexual and mental health.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The proprietor and leaders have failed to ensure that the independent school standards (the standards) are met in full. This is because they have not put systems that are sufficiently rigorous in place to monitor the school's effectiveness and compliance with the standards. Leaders should ensure that they are suitably knowledgeable about the standards, and they design and implement systems to assure themselves that a good quality of education is provided, and the standards are met fully.
- Staff expectations are too low. Pupils do not achieve the qualifications and grades of which they are capable. Leaders should ensure that all staff members are suitably ambitious for pupils, fully understand pupils' special educational needs, and provide the support to allow pupils to reach their potential.
- Curriculum planning and implementation are weak. Curriculum plans are often a list of headings taken from a qualification's specification. Consequently, there is a lack of thought given to the organisation and coherence of the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that staff members have the ability to design and implement well-thought-out plans that ensure that pupils remember more.
- Staff members' contributions to records about pupils lack detail and specificity. This leads to pupil-centred planning that is not as precise as it needs to be. The proprietor should ensure that staff, including leaders, improve the quality of their recording.

How can I feed back my views?

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The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	147471
DfE registration number	878/6082
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10189004
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	13 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	48
Number of part-time pupils	11
Proprietor	Community Mentoring and Support Community Interest Company
Chair	James Evans
Head of school	Rosalind Harman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£28,000 to £34,000
Telephone number	01242 224509
Website	www.cmas-school-devon.co.uk
Email address	info@cmas-school-devon.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- CMAS School Devon is an independent special school operated by Community Mentoring and Support, a community interest company. The proprietor also runs a similar school in Gloucestershire.
- The school gained registration on 27 November 2019 and opened to pupils in January 2020.
- The school operates from three sites in Devon. In Exeter, the school operates from Wonford Community and Learning Centre. In south Devon, the school is based in a suite of rooms in South Devon University Technical College, Kingsteignton Road, Newton Abbot TQ12 2QA. The north Devon base is located in Bishop's Tawton Methodist Church, Old Exeter Road, Bishop's Tawton EX32 0AL. The sites in north and south Devon have changed since the school's pre-registration inspection.
- The head of school took up post on 21 June 2021. The previous head of school is now the proprietor's strategic leader for curriculum, teaching and learning.
- The school uses two alternative provision settings: Breakthrough – Transformation Trust, and Sirona Therapeutic Horsemanship Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).
- Pupils at the school all have an education, health and care plan. They have been placed in the school by their local authority. All pupils have social, emotional or mental health needs. Many pupils also have autism spectrum disorder.

Information about this inspection

We 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors met with the chair of the proprietorial board, executive leaders, the head of school, senior leaders and other staff members with specific leadership responsibilities.
- Inspectors met with subject leaders, teachers, mentors and administrative staff. At each site, inspectors spoke with pupils about their experience of school and their learning.

- Inspectors did deep dives in English, mathematics, PE and science. In each of these subjects, inspectors met with the lead member of staff and teachers, reviewed curriculum plans, visited lessons, spoke with pupils and looked at pupils' work.
- Inspectors toured each site with leaders to evaluate the suitability of the premises and the arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils.
- Inspectors also scrutinised the school's policies, safeguarding records, admissions and attendance registers, and paperwork specific to pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The school's proposed change to school premises

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, inspectors checked whether the school meets the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **The school meets the independent school standards relevant to the material change. The material change has already been implemented.**

- Inspectors considered the suitability of the premises and the welfare, health and safety arrangements at the Bishop's Tawton and Newton Abbot sites. The school had relocated to these premises since the pre-registration inspection, but had not notified the registration authority.

Inspection team

Iain Freeland, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jen Edwards

Ofsted Inspector

Stewart Gale

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 15 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.

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.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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