

Belong School Gloucestershire

Church Lane, Whaddon, Gloucester, Gloucestershire GL4 0UF

Inspection date

18 December 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 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1) to 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d) to 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(g) to 2(2)(i), 2A(1), 2A(1)(b), 2A(1)(d) to 2A(2)

- The proprietor proposes to lower the age range of pupils that can attend the school from 12 to 11 years old. All pupils joining the school will have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
- The school has reviewed its current ambitious curriculum to ensure that it caters for pupils aged 11. The schemes of work incorporate all aspects of the curriculum required by the independent school standards (the standards). The organisation of the curriculum is coherent. It fully accounts for the potential needs of younger pupils who may join the school. For example, the proprietor has recruited staff with primary experience, including early reading expertise, as it anticipates that some pupils may be at the early stages of learning to read.
- The school will tailor the curriculum to meet pupils' individual needs. When new pupils arrive, staff will continue to complete comprehensive on-entry assessments. Following these, each pupil will have a personalised curriculum plan. These include individual targets from pupils' EHC plans and bespoke interventions, such as speech and language, if required.
- Draft timetables confirm how teachers will implement the schemes of work for pupils aged 11. Pupils will have daily reading as part of 'core learning'. The school will place a strong focus on pastoral support as some pupils may have missed out on education for long periods of time. All pupils will have a key worker who will communicate with parents weekly. It is clear how the Year 7 curriculum feeds into academic qualifications, such as functional skills and GCSEs, as pupils move through the school.
- The school already provides a comprehensive personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education that meets the needs of existing pupils. The PSHE curriculum makes clear how pupils aged 11 will build their knowledge year after year, including relationships and sex education. Furthermore, the aspiration, career and employment curriculum prepares Year 7 pupils for destination opportunities in Years 10 and 11.

Paragraphs 3 to 4

- The school has already implemented an ongoing training programme for staff. Teachers have experience of working with pupils who have previously missed long periods of education. They are equipped with effective teaching approaches to meet the needs of pupils. Teachers will adapt lessons based on pupils' precise needs. The end of lesson 'take aways' will inform future teaching and check what pupils' know and understand. Staff have the expertise to transfer the same principles to meet a range of SEND needs for younger pupils.
- The school has deliberately structured the curriculum to include topics and themes that will engage pupils. Staff's expertise in subjects, such as hospitality and catering, contributes well to pupils learning new skills. The resources already in place are appropriate to meet the needs of pupils that the school proposes to admit.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met if the material change requests are approved.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraphs 5 to 5(d)(iii)

- The school actively promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. It seeks ways to engage pupils in new experiences based on their talents and interests, ranging from blacksmithing courses to visiting places of worship. Whole-school events and enrichment activities are likely to remain if younger pupils were part of the school.
- The curriculum specifies how the school promotes fundamental British values. For example, in daily tutor time, pupils learn about the rule of law, democracy and respect for others, including people with protected characteristics as outlined in the Equality Act 2010. The school has a pupil parliament. This will include Year 7 pupils if the Department for Education (DfE) agrees to lower the age range.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met if the material change requests are approved.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

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

- The school has prepared a safeguarding policy. It takes account of the most recent guidance issued by the DfE. The policy is published on the school's website and available to parents. The policy provides comprehensive guidance to staff about their safeguarding responsibilities.
- The proprietor has created a highly effective culture of safeguarding. Designated safeguarding leads demonstrate an impressive knowledge of statutory guidance. From safer recruitment practices to daily debriefs, they ensure that staff receive relevant training on important contextual issues such as harmful sexualised behaviour and online safety.

- An induction programme will take place to provide new staff with the necessary safeguarding knowledge to keep pupils safe. This will include information about whistleblowing and managing allegations against staff.
- The school keeps thorough records of any reported safeguarding incidents. These show that safeguarding leaders work swiftly and proactively with multi-agency safeguarding hubs, such as the police, to keep pupils safe from harm.
- The designated safeguarding team meets weekly to monitor ongoing concerns and discuss pertinent cases. They understand the vulnerabilities of pupils at the school and adapt the range of support provided accordingly. They keep the proprietor informed about all safeguarding matters. The school has robust procedures in place to deal with the proposed increase in pupil numbers and the change in premises.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 14

- The proprietor has written robust health and safety policy and procedures, including for the proposed new site. The school has thorough systems in place to record weekly and monthly checks. For example, it checks the temperature of water weekly. The proprietor reviews the systems to ensure they comply with the standards. It intends to replicate the same high-quality procedures for the proposed increase in capacity and change in premises.
- The proprietor understands the fire safety regulations. The existing school building complies fully with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The proprietor has ensured that fire signs, emergency exits and fire safety equipment are suitably located throughout the building and regularly checked. The school completes any recommended actions from the external fire risk assessment swiftly.
- The school has a fire policy for the proposed new premises. It identifies the fire wardens, muster points and evacuation routes. Documentation indicates that an external expert is due to complete the fire risk assessment on 14 January 2025. Furthermore, fire extinguishers will be installed on 3 January 2025. If the material change is approved for the new premises, the proprietor will ensure that the fire risk assessment complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 before admitting pupils.
- The school has effective supervision routines on the current site. The proprietor will adopt the same high staff-to-pupil ratios if pupil numbers grow beyond the current 32 the school is registered for. A detailed plan shows how staff will supervise pupils closely and greet them when they arrive each morning. For example, staff will be strategically positioned by the school lane, entry gate, car park and atrium. The school aims to continue to provide a calm, orderly and supportive start to the school day. The proprietor intends to increase pupil numbers gradually to ensure that appropriate staffing is in place. The proposals for staff deployment and supervision are likely to be appropriate should the material change be approved.

Paragraphs 16 to 16(b)

- The proprietor has sufficient oversight of risk assessments. The school has current risk assessments for various activities, such as working with tools in food technology or local outings. These are fit for purpose. They state the control measures to mitigate risk. Staff regularly review and update risk assessments to ensure they are relevant to

each activity.

- The proprietor has written a site risk assessment for the proposed premises. It has already considered the additional risks of having extra adults and pupils on the premises, including how to mitigate the risks associated with the pond area, the nearby canal and the gymnasium.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met if the material change requests are approved.

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

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

- The proprietor has ensured that all of the required checks on staff working at the school have been completed before employment commences. These include medical fitness, the right to work in the UK and prohibition from teaching checks.
- The school employs a few long-term agency staff to work at the school. The proprietor assures itself that the necessary checks, including a comprehensive safeguarding induction, are completed for these staff.
- Members of the proprietor body, Belong CIC, have all had the statutory checks to determine their suitability in their roles, including section 128 checks.
- The school maintains a well-organised electronic single central record. It complies with statutory legislation outlined in 'Keeping children safe in education' 2024. The human resources lead, the headteacher and the chair of the proprietor body check the record regularly for accuracy and completeness. The systems in place will allow the proprietor to increase the number of staff and pupils on roll without compromising safety.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met if the material change requests are approved.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1) to 23(1)(c), 24(1) to 24(1)(b), 24(2), 25 to 29(1)(b)

- The proprietor has purchased and converted a former three-storey hostel as the proposed new school. It is significantly larger than the current premises and suitable for increasing pupil numbers and expanding the age range. The accommodation includes dedicated classrooms for different age groups and specialist rooms for English, mathematics, food technology and art. The school also has several office spaces, breakout areas, therapy rooms and an indoor gymnasium.
- The proposed site is at the end of a no-through road in a rural village. Adjacent to the site is a residential house. To the rear of the premises is a canal. The proprietor has erected an anti-climb perimeter fence to ensure secure access from the main entrance only. The proprietor intends to provide a staff car park and a turning circle for pupils' transport.

- At the time of the inspection, the school is not ready to admit pupils. Work continues refurbishing the building to the high standard seen on the current site. For example, fencing around the pond and the multi-use games area (MUGA) remains unfinished. The proprietor has confirmed the dates for the completion of this work. It will make sure that unfinished work complies with the standards if the material change is approved.
- The existing site and proposed new site have suitable toilets, showers and changing spaces. These are available exclusively to pupils and intended to be used by one pupil at a time. The number of toilets and showers on the new site is sufficient for the proposed increase in pupil numbers.
- Both sites have designated medical rooms for pupils if they are unwell. Each room is next to a toilet and has washing facilities.
- Rooms throughout each building have suitable lighting, acoustics and ventilation. Outside, the proprietor provides external lighting to help maintain safe entry and exit to the main school sites for staff, pupils and visitors.
- The school has carefully considered the organisation of new learning areas so that pupils aged 11 can learn in the most suitable space to meet their needs. The proprietor has fitted restrictors on all windows for pupils' safety.
- Drinking-water will be available throughout the day and labelled as such. Hot water in washbasins will have mixer taps so that it does not scald.
- The new site benefits from a large outside area and quiet play zone. These are suitable for outdoor physical education sessions.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met if the material change requests are approved.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1) to (34)(1)(c)

- The proprietor has given significant thought to the rationale for the material change. The main commissioning local authority has complete confidence in the school's work. It has identified a need in the local area, including for pupils aged 11. As a result, the proprietor wishes to increase capacity and lower the age range to meet this need. If registered, it intends to recruit additional staff and increase pupil numbers gradually over the next 12 months.
- The chair of the proprietor body and the headteacher have extensive experience of running successful independent special schools. They have drawn on this experience to identify what needs to be done to make sure that the design of the proposed new premises is suitable for pupils with SEND. Work completed to date, including the development of the curriculum and welfare arrangements, is of high quality. The proprietor has demonstrated that it can cater for the increase in pupil numbers and educate Year 7 pupils in the setting, while maintaining the current high standards.
- The proprietor maintains strong oversight of the school's work. It has established clear lines of accountability. Leaders at all levels demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the standards. They make regular checks to make sure the standards will remain met over

time.

- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met if the material change requests are granted.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The accessibility plan meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

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	146671
DfE registration number	916/6025
Inspection number	10371163

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 category	Independent day school
Proprietor	Belong Learning CIC
Chair	James Evans
Headteacher	Saar Yaniv
Annual fees (day pupils)	£58,401
Telephone number	03003035755
Website	www.belonglearning.co.uk/gloucestershire
Email address	reception.gloucestershire@belonglearning.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	6 to 8 June 2023

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	12 to 17	11 to 17	11 to 17
Number of pupils on the school roll	32	50	50

Pupils

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

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	32	50
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	32	50
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	32	50
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	32	50

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	17	20
Number of part-time teaching staff	0	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	13	17

Information about this school

- Belong Gloucestershire is an independent special school. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs and autism. All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan.
- The school is currently located at Church Lane, Whaddon, Gloucester, Gloucestershire, GL4 0UF. It plans to move to the proposed new site at Wild Goose Lodge, Shepherds Patch, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, GL2 7BP.
- Changes to the school's leadership have occurred since the previous standard inspection. The current headteacher took up their post in January 2024.
- Three local authorities fund and place pupils in the school.
- The school had a full standard inspection in May 2023. It was judged to be good for its overall effectiveness, with all standards met.

- The school makes use of two unregistered alternative provisions.

Information about this inspection

- The DfE commissioned the inspection following the proprietor's material change request to move premises and increase the maximum number of pupils from 32 to 50. The proprietor also requested that the age range be lowered from 12 to 17 to 11 to 17.
- The purpose of the inspection was to check whether the school is likely to meet the relevant standards if the DfE approves the requested material changes.
- This was the second material change inspection since the school's registration. The first material change request was in September 2021.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the designated safeguarding lead and two executive officers of Belong Learning CiC, including the chair of the proprietor body, to discuss the proposed material changes.
- The inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector visited the current school site and the proposed new site at Wild Goose Lodge, Shepherds Patch, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, GL2 7BP with leaders.
- During both visits, the inspector reviewed the current provisions and discussed the school's plans to develop the proposed new site. He considered the suitability and safety of the proposed new accommodation, the curriculum for pupils aged 11 and the feasibility of permitting 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.
- The inspector visited lessons and spoke to some staff and pupils informally.

Inspection team

Dale Burr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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