

Belong School Devon

Address: Grace Road West, Marsh Barton, Exeter, Devon, EX2 8PU

Unique reference number (URN): 147471

Inspection report: 9 June 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.
- **Insufficient evidence:** Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Strong standard

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

Pupils' personal development underpins everything this school does. From the moment they join, staff take time and care to get to know pupils, their strengths, challenges and barriers to learning and attendance. Learning coaches play a key role in building pupils' confidence and resilience through strong relational practice and daily contact with parents and carers. For many pupils, this means their attitudes towards school become increasingly positive over time, marking a significant shift in their self-belief and trust in the education system.

Pupils learn about healthy relationships, the dangers of substance misuse and how to keep themselves safe online. The personal, social, health and economic curriculum is adapted to meet pupils' emerging needs. Staff are quick to recognise patterns of behaviour and gaps in pupils' understanding of fundamental British values. For example, they put in a place a programme to educate pupils and tackle misogynistic views. Pupils also learn about a wide range of other topics which prepares them well for life after school, such as budgeting, the judiciary system and water safety.

The school's wider provision is extensive, and includes a wide range of outdoor activities such as climbing, kayaking and coasteering. Pupils enjoy taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's award. They undertake varied and meaningful volunteering work, building social skills, independence and a sense of responsibility. Staff are quick to recognise when pupils are ready to be leaders and role models to younger pupils, and how to facilitate positive peer interactions in social times, such as football and fantasy games. The school's successful residential trip is an opportunity for pupils to shine. Staff plan this meticulously to ensure that pupils' needs are met and they are able to benefit fully from this experience.

Pupils receive extensive support when choosing their post 16 destinations. Starting in key stage 3, the school provides comprehensive advice and guidance, work place experiences and supported visits to colleges to ensure pupils make informed decisions about their futures. Alongside the school's other work, this effective preparation for the pupils' next stage is a notable strength of this school.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils often arrive with gaps in their education. However, the school quickly identifies pupils' potential and, at key stage 4, provides opportunities for them study towards GCSEs in core subjects, as well as others matched to their interests and talents. Typically, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment and training. For many, this means successfully attending a mainstream college, a significant achievement when mainstream school has not worked for them.

Pupils typically make good progress from their starting points. While some pupils can access the school's ambitious curriculum, some others have significant gaps in reading,

writing and mathematical knowledge. Additional support is provided. However, for some, these gaps do not fill quickly. Sometimes, this is due to poor attendance or barriers associated with wellbeing or mental health. However, at times, the small steps required for pupils to catch up have not been precisely mapped out, for example in phonics. Weaknesses in handwriting and spelling are not systematically addressed.

Pupils are rightly proud of their well-presented books and the work they complete, many having not been able to show this in previous schools.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

The school has established robust procedures to monitor pupils' attendance. As with other areas of the school's work, leaders have a detailed understanding of the barriers pupils face. From pupils' first day at the school, regular attendance is a priority. The school has effectively supported many pupils to attend more regularly, including those who may not have attended any school for some time. However, for some, this remains an ongoing challenge, despite daily contact with parents and carers from pupils' learning coaches. Overall, attendance has improved over the last three years, however rates of persistent absence are still higher than leaders would like.

The school is highly effective at supporting pupils to regulate their own behaviour. Expectations are high, and pupils typically respond very positively. The school is absolutely clear that what is not acceptable in society is not acceptable at school. These clear boundaries help pupils feel safe and that school is a place where they belong. None of this happens by accident. Every interaction is positive and intentional. Staff expertly model how to behave and interact in a positive way with adults and peers, skilfully supporting pupils when they need it. When pupils struggle, effective pastoral support and guided reflection helps pupils learn from their mistakes. As a result, pupils typically have positive attitudes towards school. They have a deep respect for staff. Warm, trusting relationships underpin the school's effective practice in this area.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Since the previous inspection, the school has strengthened its curriculum to reflect its ambition that all pupils can achieve positive academic outcomes. Leaders have ensured that subjects are carefully planned and sequenced, setting out the most important knowledge and skills pupils need. It is highly ambitious and complemented by bespoke outdoor learning and relational sessions with learning coaches.

Pupils' progress is regularly assessed and this informs their next steps. However, this is more well-embedded in some areas than in others. Typically, teaching is effective. When this is the case, teachers have good knowledge of the subject. They check pupils' understanding effectively and adapt resources to meet pupils' individual needs. However, in some cases, teachers do not recap the prior learning pupils need in order to access the work in that learning session. This means pupils are less able to work independently. At times, the impact of this is compounded when pupils have been absent.

The school supports pupils who have gaps in their reading, writing and mathematical knowledge. Pupils who need to learn phonics receive the help they need, though staff

expertise is developing. There are robust plans in place to ensure the phonics scheme is delivered as intended to strengthen this vitally important aspect of the school's work.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

This is an inclusive school. All pupils who attend Belong School Devon have an educational health and care plan (EHCP) and many have additional vulnerabilities, such as financial disadvantage, experience of childhood trauma, or being open to social care. Many pupils' experiences of mainstream school have been negative. The school is highly effective at getting to know pupils, the barriers they face and what they need to help them thrive. The school's close work with families is a real strength and parents value the regular contact they have with pupils' learning coaches and other staff. These relationships are key to helping the school reduce or remove barriers to learning and attendance.

The school has various systems in place to set out plans to support pupils' wellbeing, fill gaps in their learning and improve their attendance, that often go beyond planned outcomes identified in pupils' EHCPs. However, sometimes these plans lack the clearly defined small steps needed to ensure targets are both ambitious and achievable. For example, some pupils need specific support to help them fill gaps in reading knowledge which, if robustly planned and reviewed, would enable them to access other aspects of the curriculum.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

The proprietor body has a clear vision for the school, underpinned by a moral imperative to improve the life chances of pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. This vision is shared by leaders and staff within the school. This means that there is a united staff body working in the best interests of pupils. The proprietor body has supported the school to ensure it meets the independent school standards securely over time.

Pupils are at the heart of decision-making. Leaders have a secure knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. This understanding informs the professional learning programme. For example, staff effectively use trauma-informed approaches when working with pupils because their ongoing training in this area has been prioritised. Staff understand that some pupils may have challenges around attachment, or need support with their sensory needs. Leaders have recognised that more work is needed to develop staff's pedagogical expertise, including in the teaching phonics.

Typically, staff feel well supported with their workload and wellbeing. They value the high expectations that leaders have of them, and the way they model the high expectations they have of pupils. Parental engagement is a notable strength of the school and, while relatively few parents and carers completed Ofsted's online survey, this view is typical of those who did: 'Each member of staff that I have interacted with shows an enormous amount of professionalism and compassion'. The school is rightly proud of its ongoing work to provide the very best opportunities to pupils who attend.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Belong School Devon is a place where pupils feel safe and can be themselves. Staff take great time and care to get to know pupils when they arrive. They understand the barriers pupils face and the reasons why they have not been able to thrive in mainstream schools. Pupils benefit from an ambitious and highly bespoke curriculum. Alongside traditional subjects, pupils take part in a range of outdoor activities and offsite visits. They benefit from regular 'relational' time with their learning coaches, where they build positive relationships and have time to reflect and discuss their progress and things they may be finding difficult. Pupils' talents are nurtured. Again, scheduled time to develop personal talents and interests is part of the school day. For example, pupils have time to develop skills and complete projects in art, design or music. While some pupils still struggle to attend regularly, the majority attend well and value these wider opportunities. This helps to create a sense of belonging.

The school has high expectations of pupils' behaviour, which align with its vision to prepare pupils for life beyond school. Over time, most pupils meet these expectations because skilled staff support them to regulate their emotions and interact positively with peers. Pupils interact across the age range and are very supportive of one another. Many pupils build their confidence and resilience and thrive in this nurturing environment. Bullying is very rare because staff are highly vigilant and effectively support pupils to resolve conflict and learn to make positive choices.

Typically, pupils enjoy their learning. The school is ambitious for them and their achievements. Many pupils are well-prepared to sit examinations at the end of Year 11. The school is highly effective in supporting pupils into their post-16 destinations, many of which are in mainstream colleges.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that they identify precise and ambitious strategies to remove the barriers to learning and attendance that pupils face, systematically adjusting these strategies when needed.
- Leaders should ensure that identified gaps in foundational knowledge close quickly, in particular by ensuring that the school's phonics scheme is delivered with consistent fidelity.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers systematically check pupils' understanding, ascertaining what they know and where there are gaps, so pupils can complete tasks with confidence and deepen their understanding of the curriculum.

About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this standard inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and checked the school's compliance with the independent school

standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with pupils, staff, leaders and the proprietor during the inspection.

Inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school caters for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, predominantly social, emotional and mental health needs and autism. All pupils who attend this school have an education, health and care plan.

The school is an independent special school.

Since the last standard inspection in May 2023, the school received a material change inspection, in June 2024. This was to increase the number of pupils it was able to take. Since this additional inspection, the school has moved sites and is now located at Grace Road West, Marsh Barton, Exeter, Devon, EX2 8PU.

The school uses one unregistered alternative provision.

The name of proprietor is Belong Learning CIC. The chair of the proprietor body is James Evans.

The fees currently charged are £42,655.53.

The email address of the school is info@belonglearning.co.uk.

Headteacher: Roz Harman

Independent school standards

Independent school standards are either met or not met for each category.

1. Quality of education provided	Standards met
All standards have been met.	
2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils	Standards met

All standards have been met.

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Standards met

All standards have been met.

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

6. Provision of information

Standards met

All standards have been met.

7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Standards met

All standards have been met.

8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:

Victoria Griffin, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Sophie Hillson, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

 This data is from 9 June 2026

Total pupils

School capacity

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

Our grades explained

Exceptional 

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard 

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard 

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention 

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement 

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

Insufficient evidence

Inspectors were unable to gather reliable enough evidence to grade an evaluation area. This is rare and normally only happens if there are no pupils on roll at the school.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted
© Crown copyright 2026



© Crown copyright