

Inspection of Running Deer School

Butterdon Wood, Willingstone, Moretonhampstead TQ13 8PY

Inspection dates: 24 to 26 June 2025

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

Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Running Deer is a school where everyone is welcome. Many pupils have joined the school following unsuccessful experiences of education elsewhere. Staff take the time to get to know them and their interests. Pupils are safe and happy. They trust staff to support and guide them.

The school has stabilised following a period of turbulence. A new leadership structure has been established. There is now an ambitious vision in place. The school has overhauled its curriculum in many areas to ensure it is broad and balanced, with focused plans to develop further the quality of education. It is implementing these at pace. However, there is more to do to ensure that pupils fully benefit from the improvements made. As a result, the quality of education that pupils receive is not good.

Pupils rise to the high behaviour expectations the school has of them. Pupils learn about how to be considerate of one another's needs. Bullying incidents are rare and are dealt with promptly.

Pupils learn about the importance of democracy, inclusion and free speech. They benefit from opportunities to develop social empathy. For example, they raise money for charity through local fundraising.

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

Since the last inspection, the school has considerably strengthened the curriculum. It now sets out the important knowledge and skills pupils need to learn. Pupils are eager to learn. In many curriculum subjects, leaders monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum. They make checks to ensure that it is being delivered in the way they intend. However, in a few subjects, leaders have not developed a comprehensive understanding of how the curriculum impacts pupils' learning.

Where the curriculum is implemented well, it is taught in a way that supports pupils to learn more over time. Pupils use subject-specific vocabulary to explain what they have learned. In science, for instance, pupils refer to complex carbohydrates and molecules when explaining the importance of nutrition.

However, teaching expertise is unevenly developed across subjects. The school has not ensured that all staff have sufficient instructional and subject knowledge. This means that the strengths of the school's teaching in some subjects are not replicated and developed more broadly across others. Therefore, some pupils do not fully deepen their understanding in these subjects.

There is a renewed, sharp focus on reading. Pupils learn about the range of human experiences through books and texts. This helps them to understand and relate to the diversity of modern Britain. Initiatives such as 'everybody read' have raised the profile of reading, and pupils appreciate opportunities to read for pleasure. Those

who are at the early stage of learning to read and those who have fallen behind quickly gain the knowledge and skills they need to become confident, fluent readers.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and an education, health and care plan. While adaptations to the curriculum are made in practice, occasionally, written support plans do not accurately reflect these adaptations or detail pupils' specific strategies and targets sufficiently. Therefore, opportunities to build on some pupils' progress are not as prompt as they could be.

At breaktimes, pupils learn to socialise confidently. Pupils are supported to self-manage and communicate their feelings. Attendance is a high priority. The school analyses attendance patterns. Staff work closely with families to gain an understanding of the causes of any absence. This has had a demonstrable impact in individual cases.

The school's wider development offer is well considered. Pupils benefit from a wealth of experiences to develop their character. Immersed in the natural world, pupils have a breadth of well-coordinated learning opportunities. They are encouraged to gain qualifications aligned with their areas of interest such as equine care and agriculture. Pupils learn about what constitutes a healthy diet and are articulate about why it is important to stay physically and mentally healthy. They are knowledgeable about different faiths and cultures. The school provides pupils with opportunities to help them make informed decisions about their career paths.

The school's leaders have a secure understanding of the independent school standards (the standards). The proprietor provides challenge and support. Along with the school, it ensures full compliance with the standards. Leaders are still in the process of strengthening curriculum oversight. Staff are positive about the recently improved consideration given to their well-being and workload. The school complies with 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)

- In a few subjects, school leaders have yet to develop a thorough understanding of how the curriculum impacts pupils' learning. As a result, gaps in some pupils' knowledge are not promptly addressed, and opportunities to build on prior learning are missed. The school should ensure that all subject leaders receive the necessary support to evaluate and enhance curriculum effectiveness.
- Teaching expertise is unevenly developed across subjects. This means that the strengths of the school's teaching in some subjects are not replicated in others. Consequently, some pupils do not learn securely across the curriculum. The

school must continue to strengthen staff's expertise to deliver the subject curriculums consistently well.

- Sometimes, pupils' support plans do not accurately reflect the adaptations made to the curriculum to address pupils' individual barriers to learning or detail specific strategies and targets. This is because they are not sufficiently precise. Consequently, opportunities to build on some pupils' progress are not as prompt as they could be. The school must ensure that written plans reflect adaptations to the curriculum and are targeted precisely to meet all pupils' individual needs.

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	143539
DfE registration number	878/6067
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10374878
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	8 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Proprietor	Running Deer Community Interest Company.
Chair	Joanna Winterburn
Headteacher	Geraldine Carter
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 72,098.54
Telephone number	01647279328
Website	www.runningdeerschool.org.uk
Email address	school@runningdeer.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	31 October to 3 November 2023

Information about this school

- Running Deer School is an independent school specialising in providing education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. The school is situated in a large area of woodland in Dartmoor National Park. There are five pods, four of which are classrooms and one which is the school office base.
- All pupils have education, health and care plans. The placements are funded by Devon and Plymouth local authorities.
- The school is run by Running Deer Community Interest Company. This is a non-profit-making organisation.
- The school uses no alternative provision.
- The school is permitted to accept pupils between the ages of eight and 16.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The previous standard inspection took place in October 2023 at which the school was judged to be inadequate.
- A progress monitoring inspection took place in May 2024. The school was judged to meet all the standards.

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.

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and members of the leadership team.
- The lead inspector held discussions with the chair of the proprietor body and the director of operations.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, personal, social and health education and mathematics. 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.

- The lead inspector listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- 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 observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school, including at lunchtime and breaktimes. In addition, the inspectors met with pupils formally and informally to hear their views.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for pupils and staff.

Inspection team

Liz Geller, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Tracy Hannon

Ofsted Inspector

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