

Inspection of Dovecote School

Shapwick Manor, 21 Station Road, Shapwick, Bridgwater, Somerset TA7 9NJ

Inspection dates: 26 to 28 April 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Parents and carers describe Dovecote School as 'life changing'. For most pupils, this is their first successful experience of education. Leaders have high expectations for what every pupil can achieve. Pupils learn a highly ambitious curriculum, centred around their talents and interests. They know that staff believe in them and place no ceiling on their learning. Pupils who previously struggled to engage with education now turn up each day, excited to learn. They progress exceptionally well through the curriculum.

Staff understand pupils' emotional needs very well. This enables them to help pupils to understand and manage their emotions successfully. Pupils develop highly respectful attitudes towards others. They interact with increasing confidence and success. Pupils learn to care for each other, listen to different opinions and speak up for themselves.

Pupils develop life skills that will help them to be independent in their next steps. As they spend longer at the school, they learn to believe in themselves. Pupils develop positive views of their future and set aspirational targets for their own development. Parents feel strongly that their children now have a brighter future. 'Dovecote helped my child to smile again', was a comment from a parent.

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

Leaders recognise that most pupils have had a turbulent previous experience of education. They act quickly to provide learning that precisely matches each pupil's needs. Leaders design the curriculum so that each pupil can achieve the best possible outcomes. Leaders combine this approach with intensive therapeutic support. These help pupils to understand themselves, before learning about others and their place in the world. Pupils quickly feel safe and secure. They excel, fuelled by the strong relationships staff build with them. As a result, pupils develop exceptional attitudes to learning and make impressive progress from their starting points.

Leaders set out the most important knowledge they want pupils to know and remember within the subjects they are learning. Teachers skilfully adapt learning so that each pupil progress well through the curriculum. They provide regular opportunities for pupils to revisit learning to help them to know and remember more. Pupils join the school throughout the year and have varying previous experiences. Teachers recognise that, as a result, they have substantial gaps in their knowledge. Teachers maintain a balance of supporting pupils to learn new knowledge while embedding previous learning. Consequently, pupils' work across the curriculum is consistently of high quality.

Leaders prioritise reading. Teachers have expert knowledge in how to teach phonics. They constantly adapt learning to meet pupils' needs. As a result, pupils make rapid progress in reading from their starting points. Pupils read books that match their

reading ability. This helps them to grow in confidence and secure familiarity with new sounds. Pupils are keen to apply their developing phonic knowledge to their writing. Older pupils benefit from carefully selected books to read within each area of the curriculum. Pupils learn to love reading. They are proud of the progress they make.

Pupils access a vast range of opportunities to develop their emotional resilience, communication and teamwork skills. Each aspect of the school's work is meticulously planned to enhance pupils' personal development. Leaders work with the local community to provide inspiring work experience for older pupils. This helps pupils to realise their hopes for the future. Pupils fully contribute to the development of the school. For example, some are school councillors. Others have set up their own support group to discuss gender identity and relationships.

Staff model how to maintain and develop secure, trusting relationships. They know pupils' emotional needs well so that they recognise when they need support. For example, staff know when to guide pupils to resolve conflict and when they can do this for themselves. They focus on developing the independence pupils need for the future. Staff expertly encourage pupils to move beyond their comfort zone and take risks. This supports pupils to make decisions and cope when things do not go as planned. Parents consider the school's impact on pupils' behaviour to be far-reaching. They say that their children can now cope in situations that would previously have caused a high level of distress.

Many staff describe the school as an inspirational place to work. They see the impact of their sheer determination to provide the very best for each pupil and family. Staff benefit from a well-thought-out programme of training. They have exceptional subject knowledge. This enables them to design learning that inspires and motivates pupils. Staff praise leaders for prioritising their well-being. They feel valued as part of a strong team.

The advisory board is committed to ensuring that all pupils achieve their best. Members share senior leaders' relentless determination for every pupil to leave the school fully prepared to face their next destination with confidence. They have a wealth of knowledge and provide substantial challenge to senior leaders about the quality of education pupils receive. They ensure that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide regular safeguarding training. This enables staff to remain vigilant to signs that a pupil may be at risk. Staff understand the procedures for identifying and reporting concerns. Leaders take prompt action in response to any issues staff raise. They liaise with other professionals and act on advice given to keep pupils safe from harm.

Pupils learn to keep safe through the curriculum. Staff use their knowledge of pupils' individual needs to ensure they know how to recognise risks and keep themselves safe, for example when online. There are many trusted adults that pupils can share their worries with.

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	149071
DfE registration number	933/6020
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10267724
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	49
Number of part-time pupils	5
Proprietor	Dovecote School Ltd
Chair	Jason Goddard
Headteacher	Neil Gage
Annual fees (day pupils)	£68,000 to £78,000
Telephone number	01458 333127
Website	www.dovecoteschool.co.uk
Email address	jgoddard@dovecoteschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This is the school's first standard inspection.
- Leaders do not use any alternative provision.
- All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils join the school at non-standard points throughout the year.
- There are currently no pupils at the school who are aged over 16.

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.

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 that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors spoke with the proprietor, the advisory board, the headteacher, the local authority, the school improvement partner and other school leaders.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives into these subjects: English, mathematics, art, and personal, social and health education. In each subject, they met with the subject leader and teachers. They visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and, where possible, talked with pupils about their learning. The lead inspector listened to pupils read to a member of staff.
- Inspectors looked at the school's safeguarding policy and the day-to-day implementation of it. They talked with staff and pupils about safeguarding, pupils' personal development and their behaviour. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- The lead inspector inspected the premises to check for compliance against the relevant independent school standards.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents, and comments made by parents online during the inspection. They also evaluated responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys. During the inspection, inspectors spoke to two parents on the telephone.

Inspection team

Jane Dennis, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Favager-Dalton

His Majesty's Inspector

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