

# Dovecote School

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

**Inspection date**

11 February 2025

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

- The school has an ambitious vision for the quality of education it provides. Its curriculum, as set out in its policy, aims to prepare pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) for their next steps in life. This includes pupils' academic learning and personal development in readiness for adulthood.
- The curriculum is adapted successfully to take into account the age, aptitudes and needs of all pupils. Every child has a personalised curriculum pathway according to the needs set out in their education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school records adaptations in written plans for each pupil. These are regularly reviewed to identify pupils' next steps in learning.
- The school uses assessment effectively to establish pupils' starting points when they join the school. It tailors its academic and therapeutic programmes to build from what pupils already know and can do. For example, pupils learn how to hold discussions respectfully and share their existing knowledge before learning new ideas together. Teaching uses assessment to check pupils' understanding and ensure that pupils have acquired new knowledge and skills. This careful use of assessment stands the school in good stead to meet the needs of more pupils if the material change is granted.
- Pupils receive suitable personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. All pupils learn how to care for their physical health, and older pupils learn how to plan journeys, for instance. Pupils of secondary age, and those above compulsory school age, receive suitable careers education, information and guidance. They learn about the choices when they leave school, such as further education or an apprenticeship.
- The school keeps its curriculum under close review. As it grows, the school is increasing the breadth of academic qualifications it offers. Teachers have the expertise they need to implement new subjects and qualifications. The proprietor has ensured and that the school has the capacity to refine the curriculum if the school grows further.

- The proprietor has ensured that the school is likely to continue meeting the independent school standards relating to part 1 if a material change is granted.

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

### *Paragraphs 5 to 5(d)(iii)*

- Pupils learn how they can make an active contribution to their local community. For example, the school has recently opened a community cafe, and pupils visit residents in local care homes for the elderly. Some older pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. This further develops their understanding of volunteering gained from the PSHE programme.
- The school enables pupils to gain an understanding of laws and encourages them to accept responsibility for their behaviour. Pupils learn about the role of public institutions, such as the police.
- Pupils benefit from cultural development opportunities. Some learn foreign languages, or work towards gaining awards in the arts, for instance. Pupils learn to behave respectfully towards each other and to respect differences, such as those arising from the protected characteristics in law.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school has the capacity to provide further opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Therefore, the school is likely to continue to meet part 2 of the independent school standards if the material change is granted.

## Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

### *Paragraphs 7 to 7 (b)*

- The proprietor ensures that there is a strong culture of safeguarding. There is an up-to-date safeguarding policy on the school website, which has due regard to the latest statutory guidance. The school implements the safeguarding policy effectively.
- The school teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe, off and online. It monitors closely their behaviour and attendance. As a result, it quickly establishes and addresses any patterns of concern. The school ensures that staff know how to identify and raise safeguarding concerns about pupils. Staff receive regular training and updates about pupils, which helps to maintain a culture of vigilance.
- The school takes timely and appropriate action to protect pupils in response to one-off incidents or trends over time. It works effectively with external safeguarding partners when required and secures appropriate support for pupils.
- The proprietor has convincing plans to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to continue the effective implementation of its safeguarding policy if the material change is granted.

### *Paragraph 11*

- The school has a written health and safety policy. It understands its responsibilities to keep pupils and staff safe, such as storing securely the hazardous materials used for cleaning, and teaching science. There are robust systems to ensure that remedial work on site is carried out promptly. The proprietor's effective oversight ensures that the school implements the health and safety policy consistently.

### *Paragraph 12*

- The school buildings comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. A new building, in operation from September 2024, has been checked by appropriately qualified professionals. There are suitable fire exits, and emergency lighting is in place throughout the school. Compliant fire doors are installed and maintained. Fire drills take place and the school records and implements any learning from these. The proprietor ensures that there are ongoing checks by qualified professionals and that the school makes the required alterations.

### *Paragraph 14*

- There are appropriate levels of supervision of pupils. The school adapts groupings according to the activities that pupils undertake. For example, there are tailored arrangements to supervise pupils on off-site visits and during social times, and older pupils as they gain more independence. To access the most recently opened building, staff and pupils cross a road. The school has rigorous procedures in place to ensure that pupils are suitably supervised when crossing the road to access this building. The school has considered carefully the staffing and arrangements required to ensure suitable supervision is maintained if the material change is granted.

### *Paragraphs 16 to 16 (b)*

- There are appropriate and detailed risk assessments in place to safeguard pupils' welfare. These are reviewed in line with the proprietor's policies. The school considers carefully the risks to pupils, such as when they arrive on site, are attending a school trip or visit, or when they are participating in forest school. It puts in place suitable mitigations for these risks, including for individual pupils where required.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school is likely to continue meeting the independent school standards relating to part 3 checked on this inspection if the material change is granted.

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

### *Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(3)(b), 21(6)*

- The proprietor ensures that safer recruitment processes are robust and followed diligently by the school. There are suitable checks made on staff. These checks are recorded on the single central register. The school has planned thoroughly how it will put in place suitable staffing if the material change is granted. Therefore, all elements of part 4 are likely to remain met if the material change is 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 school's premises are suitable in size, up-keep and design to accommodate the increased numbers of pupils should the material change be granted. A new building, which opened in September 2024 has further enhanced the school's facilities. Across the site, there is ample space indoors and outdoors for teaching, therapy and physical education.
- Buildings and external features, such as the artificial sports pitch, are exceptionally well maintained. This is a result of the proprietor's high expectations of care for the

site and a robust maintenance schedule. The school undertakes swiftly any remedial work which is required.

- Indoor spaces are well lit and acoustically suitable. They are free of clutter and adapted to the sensory needs of pupils. For example, lighting is adjusted according to the activities and pupils undertaking them.
- The school has considered carefully the facilities required to develop the skills of older pupils if they attend the school, as requested in this material change. For example, a dedicated building is already being used primarily for the teaching of older pupils. This building has a kitchen where older pupils learn life skills, such as preparing breakfast. There is a social area which already helps older pupils experience greater independence.
- There is a dedicated medical room in the main school building, and supplementary space to accommodate medical examination and treatment in the most recently opened building. The principal medical room has its own toilet and washing facility. Medicines are stored securely and in close proximity to the pupils who need them.
- There are suitable toilet and washing facilities throughout the school buildings. This includes changing accommodation and showers. There are suitable, clearly marked drinking water facilities readily available to pupils.
- The proprietor's plans, and current systems and processes, show that they are well placed to ensure the independent school standards in part 5 are likely to remain met if the material change is granted.

## Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

### *Paragraph 34*

- The school's plans for the material change are convincing and robust. It works closely with relevant local authorities to help ensure that provision meets local need. This has led the request to increase its capacity, and to provide for students up to the age to 19. The school has already developed the site and has planned staffing arrangements to provide for more, and older, pupils with EHC plans.
- The proprietor is likely to ensure that part 8 of the independent school standards will remain met if the material change is granted. Leaders have secure knowledge of the independent school standards and how to meet them consistently and continually over time. They have applied this knowledge to propose this expansion to increase the number of admitted pupils.
- The proprietor and leaders demonstrate suitable knowledge, skills and expertise, and high ambitions for every pupil. They are committed to providing a strong quality of education and pastoral care to vulnerable pupils with a range of special educational needs. They demonstrate a strong commitment to actively promote pupils' well-being, welfare and safety.
- Leaders have ensured that the independent school standards in scope for this inspection are likely to be met if the proposed material changes are approved.

## **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	149071
DfE registration number	933/6020
Inspection number	10375305

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 status	Independent school
Proprietor	Dovecote School Ltd
Chair	Jason Goddard
Headteacher	Neil Gage
Annual fees (day pupils)	£68,000 to £82,000
Telephone number	01458 333127
Website	<a href="http://www.dovecoteschool.co.uk">www.dovecoteschool.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:reception@dovecoteschool.co.uk">reception@dovecoteschool.co.uk</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	26 to 28 April 2023

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	5 to 18	5 to 19	5 to 19
Number of pupils on the school roll	84	130	130

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	84	130
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	84	130
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	84	130
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	84	130

## Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	22	32
Number of part-time teaching staff	0	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	40	50

## Information about this school

- The school received its most recent standard inspection from 26 to 28 April 2023.
- All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan. Pupils have communication and interaction needs and/or social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- Pupils join the school at non-standard points throughout the year.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider.

- The school opened a new site in September 2024. This site is adjacent to the existing school. Its address is Dovecote School, Church Farm, Church Road, Shapwick, Bridgwater TA7 9NE.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education in response to the proprietor's request to increase the pupil capacity from 90 to 130 and the age range from five to 18 to five to 19. This is the first material change that the school has applied to make.
- During the inspection, the inspector met with the headteacher and other senior leaders and the chair of the school's advisory board.
- The inspector reviewed the premises, met with leaders and reviewed the school's plans, to assess whether the relevant independent school standards are likely to continue to be met if the material change is granted.
- The inspector reviewed and evaluated documents provided by the school, including risk assessments, policies, the single central record and safeguarding information.

## Inspection team

James Oldham, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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