

Inspection of Coombe House School

Coombe House School, Donhead St Mary, Salisbury Road, Shaftesbury, Wiltshire SP7 9LP

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 July 2025

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Coombe House School is a vibrant place to learn. Pupils arrive each morning with enthusiasm. The atmosphere in classrooms and around corridors is calm and positive. Pupils are happy, safe and behave well. They trust staff to support and guide them.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and an education, health and care plan. Many pupils have faced significant challenges in their education before joining the school. Staff take time to understand each pupil's needs well. They use this knowledge effectively to build strong and trusting relationships with pupils. Pupils feel valued and know that they are appreciated and belong.

Many pupils recognise the positive difference this school is making in their lives. Bespoke support is on hand for pupils when they need it. For example, the school provides a range of sensory spaces and quiet zones. This helps pupils develop a range of skills and practices to manage their senses.

Pupils meet staff's high expectations academically, socially and emotionally. They enjoy learning and take pride in their work. They value the rewards they receive for their perseverance and success. Pupils enjoy social times. Staff support pupils in interacting with each other and making friends.

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

The proprietor board and school leaders have an ambitious vision for the school and what pupils will achieve. The school is well led and managed. This includes oversight of the growth and effectiveness of the school. Staff value the care leaders have for their workload and well-being. The decisions staff make place pupils at their heart. The school identifies and meets the needs of the range of pupils who attend.

There is a broad and ambitious curriculum in place. It meets the requirements set out in the independent school standards (the standards). It includes the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn and when they need to learn it. It is engaging and interesting, opening pupils' eyes to the world around them.

In most subjects, teaching helps pupils to build their knowledge. Staff skilfully weave pupils' interests into subjects to deepen their thinking. For example, pupils measure pollution in a local river as part of their work on geography. However, the school has not ensured that staff's expertise is fully developed in all subjects. The important information pupils need to know is not made sufficiently clear. Consequently, some pupils do not learn as well as they could.

In most subjects, the checks made on pupils' learning identify gaps and misconceptions. Staff address these before they become embedded. Pupils build on firm foundations of knowledge. However, occasionally, staff do not identify where

pupils have developed misconceptions. Consequently, some pupils do not build securely on previous learning.

The school has placed a sharp focus on reading. Pupils are supported to engage in texts in a variety of ways such as listening to adults read or audiobooks. They are exposed to a rich diet of reading materials, including novels, instructions and emails. 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. Pupils talk with interest about their favourite book or reading material. They are encouraged to publish their own books, which are then enjoyed by others in the school.

Typically, pupils behave well in lessons. Attendance is a high priority for the school. The school meticulously analyses the attendance of each pupil to find out what support it can offer pupils and their families to build positive attendance habits. This has had a demonstrable impact in individual cases.

The school's personal development offer is exceptional and worthy of being shared. It is highly effective and supports pupils to experience repeated success. Pupils develop resilience and are inspired to be aspirational about their future lives. Staff work with pupils to identify particular areas of personal development that would benefit from strengthening, as well as building on areas of interest. For example, pupils become highly knowledgeable about water and road safety. They have regular practical opportunities to build their swimming and cycling skills in a controlled environment. Visits to the locality follow purposeful learning, which builds and rehearses skills and promotes positive engagement in the wider community. The school designs bespoke and creative opportunities for work experience and gaining qualifications and accreditations to prepare pupils for their next stage of education, employment or training.

Staff know that identifying and managing risk is a barrier for many pupils. Consequently, they ensure pupils learn water and road safety skills. The carefully crafted personal, social and health education curriculum helps pupils to learn about important issues. This includes what constitutes a healthy relationship and a healthy diet. The curriculum is richly enhanced with opportunities to engage with current affairs. Pupils are knowledgeable about topical issues.

The standards and the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 are met. The school's buildings are kept in good order. The school engages parents and carers thoughtfully and positively in a way that supports pupils' education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school has not ensured that staff's teaching expertise is fully developed in all subjects. The important information pupils need to know is not made sufficiently clear. Consequently, the teaching in some areas of the curriculum does not help some pupils learn as securely as they could. The school should ensure that all staff have the teaching expertise to deliver the curriculum as intended.
- Occasionally, the checks on pupils' understanding of new material do not identify misconceptions and gaps. This means some pupils move on before they are ready. They do not build learning securely over time. The school should ensure that staff have the knowledge and expertise to use assessment to spot gaps and then inform teaching so that it supports pupils to build their knowledge cumulatively across the curriculum.

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	149019
DfE registration number	865/6059
Local authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	10374883
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	131
Number of part-time pupils	8
Proprietor	Dorset Centre of Excellence Limited
Chair	Ian Comfort
Headteacher	Darren Harte
Annual fees (day pupils)	£52,000.00
Telephone number	01747449820
Website	www.coombehouseschool.org.uk
Email address	office@coombehouseschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 to 22 June 2023

Information about this school

- Dorset Council is the sole shareholder for the proprietor body, Dorset Centre of Excellence. The school is in Wiltshire, close to the border of Dorset. The vast majority of pupil placements are funded by Dorset local authority. The proprietor also admits a smaller number of pupils from Wiltshire and Somerset local authorities.
- All pupils have education, health and care plans. Pupils have social, emotional or mental health needs and/or autism.
- The school uses 10 unregistered alternative provisions.
- The school is permitted to accept pupils between the ages of five and 19.
- 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 school was registered by the Department for Education on 6 May 2022. This is the school's second standard inspection.
- The proprietor conducted an emergency closure of the school one week after it opened. The school reopened on 23 June 2022 and then closed early for the summer break on 9 July 2022. The proprietor delayed opening the school to pupils until 13 September 2022.
- An emergency inspection took place in October 2022 at the request of the Department for Education.
- In November 2022, the managing director joined the school and acted as an interim headteacher. In January 2023, the headteacher joined the school.

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.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English (with a focus on early reading), mathematics and personal, social and health education. 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.

- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about some other subjects.
- To inspect safeguarding, the lead inspector met with the school's safeguarding team, including the designated safeguarding lead. They scrutinised the school's records, including the single central record of adults working in the school. Inspectors spoke with staff about their training and their use of the school's safeguarding systems. They also held discussions with pupils to consider whether they felt safe in school.
- Inspectors checked the premises, including the arrangements for fire safety, health and safety and site maintenance.
- Inspectors considered comments from parents submitted via Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. They also took into account the responses to the survey for staff.

Inspection team

Liz Geller, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David New

Ofsted Inspector

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