

# Inspection of The Forum School

Shillingstone, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 0QS

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Inspection dates: 22 to 24 October 2024

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Sixth-form provision

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

The quality of education pupils receive is improving steadily. However, the starting point for pupils' learning is not always accurately identified, this includes in the sixth form. This can lead to important curriculum content not being taught. Many pupils have gaps in their knowledge.

Pupils engage well with their learning when it is interesting and meets their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff carefully plan personal development opportunities for pupils based on their talents and interests. For example, pupils can go horse riding or to the gym. Pupils enjoy outdoor education lessons where they learn how to care for animals and the importance of teamwork. Through these experiences, pupils learn to be active citizens in their school community. Work to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain is ongoing.

Positive relationships between pupils and staff are built on trust and respect. Pupils are skilfully supported to recognise and respond appropriately to their emotions. They learn how to keep themselves safe, including online. With support, pupils learn how to nurture friendships. Improved communication between the school and parents and carers means parents know what their child is learning and their achievements. Pupils attend school regularly. They are happy and safe in school.

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

The school's new leadership team are passionate and knowledgeable practitioners. They have accurately identified the school's strengths and weaknesses. Well-informed and decisive action has already resulted in positive changes for pupils and for staff. For example, all staff have completed training in teaching early reading. The school is focused on raising staff's expectations and pupils' outcomes. This work started with supporting staff to better meet pupils' needs through behaviour management training. They also, reviewed pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to set bespoke targets for each pupil.

Staff effectively help pupils understand their emotions and responses. Clear expectations for pupils' behaviour and appropriate staff actions are detailed in pupils' positive behaviour support plans. Pupils' plans are frequently reviewed and updated by the school's education, health and care staff. This team sometimes includes external professionals and parents. If staff are required to amend their practice, the school ensures that staff complete appropriate training. The school checks that the members of staff have implemented the changes successfully. The school's system for behaviour support has a positive impact on pupils' behaviour. The number of poor behaviour incidents has reduced significantly.

The same team approach helps pupils effectively reach their EHC plan targets. education, therapy and care staff work with parents and pupils to gain an accurate understanding of pupils' needs and aspirations. This information is used to carefully

plan pupils' next steps. For example, pupils may be supported to try new foods to improve their diet or learn how to turn-take and share by playing games.

Nevertheless, the school's checks on what pupils know and remember in curriculum subjects are not as well developed. When staff accurately identify what pupils know and can do, the learning matches pupils' abilities. The next step in their learning is correctly recognised. When checks on pupils' learning are ineffective, pupils are not helped to secure new knowledge. For example, staff do not always accurately identify what pupils already know or where there are gaps in pupils' phonic knowledge. Therefore, learning is often repeated, and pupils do not progress through the phonics curriculum as quickly as they could. Staff checks on pupils' curriculum knowledge is underdeveloped in most subjects.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a sharp focus on developing the staff's knowledge of early reading and pupils' enjoyment of reading. Pupils' reading books now match their reading ability. Pupils are reading more and from a wider selection of texts. Older pupils learn to read and understand words they will need as adults, such as road signs. Improved reading helps pupils gain qualifications in a range of subjects. This helps to prepare pupils well for adulthood.

School leaders are reviewing the curriculum to ensure pupils develop important skills and knowledge over time. For example, the relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education curriculum is less well developed. The RSE curriculum's sequence of learning is not mapped out to ensure pupils, including students in the sixth form, gain the necessary knowledge to be well prepared for life in modern Britain. The careers programme has improved. Sixth-form students look forward to their work experience sessions. However, the school has identified that further work is needed to meet every pupil's needs and aspirations effectively.

The proprietor body and executive leaders regularly check a wealth of whole school information such as pupil attendance and behaviour. The proprietor ensures that there is oversight of health and safety procedures and policies. This supports pupils' safety in and around the site. Even so, the proprietor body's knowledge of the school's quality of education and premises is less well-formed. Checks to ensure that premises risk assessments are well-resourced and implemented effectively are not as robust.

Pupil attendance is strong. Established routines help pupils come to school each morning. The school supports parents in overcoming barriers that may prevent their children from attending school. Pupils who reside at the school have access to high-quality health and medical care. Maintenance of resources that support pupils to lead a healthy and active lifestyle is prioritised. Pupils are encouraged to regularly swim, ride bikes and learn to cook healthy meals. Staff report increased school leader consideration and care for their well-being.

The proprietor body ensures that the independent school standards and the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 are met.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

During the inspection, minor improvements were made to the premises and safeguarding procedures.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

- Gaps in pupils' subject knowledge and what pupils already know are not always accurately identified. This means that subsequent learning does not help pupils secure new knowledge or build on prior knowledge well enough. The proprietor body should support the school to accurately identify what pupils know and can do, what knowledge gaps need addressing and what they need to learn next.
- The school's RSE and health education curriculum thinking does not help staff teach the sensitive aspects well enough. Consequently, pupils have limited knowledge, particularly of the RSE aspect of the curriculum. The proprietor body needs to ensure that the school's RSE and health education curriculum prepares pupils effectively for life in modern Britain.
- The proprietor body has ensured that checks are made to secure compliance with the independent school standards. However, there is not sufficient rigour to check the quality and implementation of premises risk assessments. The proprietor body must introduce monitoring systems to assure themselves that the school has the necessary support and resources to implement risk assessments and maintain the premises to a sufficiently high standard.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	116593
<b>DfE registration number</b>	838/6033
<b>Local authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	10342005
<b>Type of school</b>	Other Independent Special School
<b>School category</b>	Independent special school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	22
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	13
<b>Proprietor</b>	Cambian Group
<b>Chair</b>	Farouk Sheikh
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jane Holloway
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£106,428 - £134,251
<b>Telephone number</b>	01258 860 295
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.cambiangroup.com/specialist-education/our-schools/autism-schools/the-forum-school/">www.cambiangroup.com/specialist-education/our-schools/autism-schools/the-forum-school/</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:forum.admin@cambiangroup.com">forum.admin@cambiangroup.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	9 to 11 November 2022

## Information about this school

- The Forum school is part of the Cambian Group, a national provider of independent specialist education.
- The school caters for pupils with autism. All pupils have education, health and care plans. A significant number of the pupils at the school are nonverbal, or semi-verbal due to their complex needs.
- The head of education was employed in September 2024.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school is registered to admit 60 pupils.
- The previous inspection in April 2024, was a progress monitoring inspection carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection and in response to a complaint about pupils' welfare, health and safety, including their supervision at the school.
- This was the first standard inspection and the second progress monitoring inspection since an emergency inspection in July 2023.

## 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.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspector held discussions with a representative of the proprietor body, the principal, head of education, care services manager, assistant head of education and staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, personal, social, health and economic education, RSE and physical 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 in lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans, spoke to leaders about some other subjects and sampled pupils' learning in mathematics and outdoor learning. This evidence contributed towards parts 1, 2 and 8 of the independent school standards.

- The inspectors also observed pupils during social times, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils and leaders about opportunities for pupils' personal development and pupils' behaviour and attendance. This evidence contributed towards parts 2, 3 and 8 of the independent school standards.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for parts 3, 6, 7 and 8 of the independent school standards. Together, they considered policies, registers and key documents such as checks and risk assessments to determine how well the school meets the standards.
- Inspection activities included a detailed tour of the site and premises to consider parts 5 and 8 of the independent school standards.
- 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. This evidence contributed towards parts 4 and 8 of the independent school standards.
- An adult was present when inspectors spoke with pupils.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. They also took into consideration the responses to the survey for staff.
- The inspectors only inspected the education provision at this school.

### **The school's progress in meeting previously failed standards**

During the inspection we checked whether the school now meets the independent school standards that it was judged to have failed at its previous additional inspection on 17 April 2024.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school now meets the previously failed standards.**

### **The school now meets the following standards**

#### **Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools**

- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

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

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
  - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently;

## **Inspection team**

Marie Thomas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Catherine Leahy

Ofsted Inspector

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